Utopia Here and Now: The Local Application of Models of the Ideal State

Simon David Herbert

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy
The University of Auckland
2021

'A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias'.[1]

    – Oscar Wilde

---

[1] Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (London: Arthur L. Humphreys, 1919), 43.

Abstract

This thesis investigates the relationship between an account of the ideal state and the historical context in which that account was written. The standard view of the ideal state is as what I call a shining beacon on the hill: it is a distant goal, which we might choose to bring our existing societies closer towards. It is often thought of as a general solution to the problem of social organisation, a scientific or quasi-scientific analysis of political relations, usually based on laws of human nature. I argue that the shining beacon view is incomplete; an ideal state is better understood as a particular solution to specific local problems. An ideal state will attempt to solve a local problem, to create a society in which that problem cannot occur. More than this, I argue that an account of the ideal state has this local focus even when its author explicitly takes themselves to be engaged in the kind of general, scientific project mentioned above. Almost in spite of themselves, ideal-state theorists are engaged in solving particular local problems, not in providing a (quasi-)scientific account of the laws of political relations. To demonstrate this, I will use five important texts from the history of ideal state theory as case studies. I begin with two base cases, ideal states whose local application is well-understood by scholars: Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (1762). More's focus on the local problem seems to be deliberate; Rousseau's may not be. These texts will help us to clarify the process of just how an ideal state can be said to solve a local problem. From there we will examine our three main case studies: Plato's *Republic* (c. 380 BC); Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651); and Karl Marx's and Friedrich Engels's *The Communist Manifesto* (1848).

Acknowledgements

First acknowledgement must go to my supervisors, Professors Tim Dare and Christopher Martin. Their high expectations have sometimes been difficult to meet, but they have always pushed me to do the best I can. Both the thesis and myself have benefited from their help and support.

Thanks to Professor W. Bradley Wendel for generously providing several illustrations of judicial candidates whose judicial decision-making was influenced by their election campaigns. The one I chose to include can be found in Chapter 3.

Mike Duncan, creator of the *Revolutions* podcast, has indirectly contributed to this thesis. Apart from being entertaining in itself, his podcast has provided a useful guide to the often confusing narratives of the English Revolution and especially the revolutionary year of 1848. In particular, Duncan is to be credited with coining the phrase 'the spectre of the French Revolution',[1] and it is thanks to him quoting Alexis de Tocqueville's *Recollections* that I was alerted to go and read the source myself, and include it in Chapter Five.

The text was ably proofread by Lee Matthews, whose eagle eye spotted a number of errors. Any which remain are, of course, entirely my own fault.

I am grateful to The University of Auckland for providing the funding and facilities which allowed this project to be completed, *ingenio et labore*.

Thanks to Professor Jeremy Waldron, Dr Andrew Withy, and Dr Ritesh Shah, who formed my examination panel, for an interesting and insightful discussion of the project.

Finally—ultimately—I must thank my wife, Annie Rose Richards. Without her, exactly none of this project would have been *started*, let alone finished. As John Stuart Mill wrote of Harriet Taylor in *On Liberty*, Annie is 'the inspirer . . . of all that is best in my writings'.[2] Her quiet support is irreplaceable.

---

[1] Mike Duncan, *7.13 the Spectre of the French Revolution*, podcast audio, Revolutions, accessed May 2021, https://thehistoryofrome.typepad.com/revolutions_podcast/2017/10/the-spectre-of-the-french-revolution.html.

[2] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* and *The Subjection of Women*, ed. Alan Ryan (London: Penguin, 2006), 3.

Table of Contents

Preface: Note on Primary Sources

There are a lot of primary philosophical sources in this project, and each of them is cited differently. There are five main texts, but I also refer reasonably often to Aristotle and several other ancient authors, as well as various other works by many of the authors we are interested in. To avoid confusion, let us clarify how I will cite each author. Detailed entries for all the primary sources in this project can be found in the Bibliography.

Plato is customarily cited by Stephanus number, referring to the pagination of Henri Estienne's (Henricus Stephanus in Latin) 1578 edition of Plato's works. *Republic* and *Laws*, Plato's two longest works, are divided into ten and twelve books, respectively; when citing those dialogues I include the Book number in Roman numerals. Thus, *Republic* begins at Stephanus number I.327a. The English text of Plato I am using is the Hackett edition, edited by John M. Cooper. All citations from Plato are given in the text, not in footnotes. Where it is not clear to which dialogue I am referring, I include its name along with the Stephanus number.

Aristotle is cited in a similar way to Plato, by Bekker number. Though Aristotle is not one of our main authors, he offers useful criticism of Plato, and Hobbes can often be seen as reacting to Aristotle, whose influence dominated the universities for centuries. Indeed, Aristotle is even briefly relevant in the chapter on Marx and Engels. All references to Aristotle's text come from the Revised Oxford Translation, edited by Jonathan Barnes. Other ancient sources referred to in Chapter 3—Thucydides, Heraclitus, Diogenes Laertius, and Xenophon—are cited in their usual format, either by Book and Chapter number or by page number. Aristotle and other ancient sources are cited in footnotes rather than in the text.

Thomas More does not divide *Utopia* into sections, other than Books I and II, which means that the most convenient way to cite him is by page number. To signify this, I add a capital U, following the style some commentators use,[1] so the description of the island of Utopia, at the beginning of Book II, can be found at (U: 43). I am using the Cambridge Texts edition, edited by George M. Logan and translated by Robert M. Adams. *Utopia* is cited in the text, but Logan's footnotes or commentary are given as footnotes.

---

[1] Specifically, Lawrence Wilde, *Thomas More's Utopia: Arguing for Social Justice* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2017).

Rousseau's *Social Contract* is divided into four Books, and each Book is further divided into a number of chapters. As a rule, Rousseau's chapters are fairly short. To cite the *Social Contract*, I give the Book in Roman numerals and the chapter in Arabic numerals, thus: (I.3). I am referring to the Penguin edition of *Of the Social Contract and Other Political Writings*, edited by Christopher Bertram and translated by Quintin Hoare. Citations from Rousseau's other works are given in footnotes.

Hobbes, in *Leviathan*, rather thoughtfully numbers his paragraphs. This makes citing him straightforward: I give the chapter number in Roman numerals and the paragraph number in Arabic numerals. Thus the famous line that life in the state of nature is 'nasty, brutish, and short' is to be found at (xiii, 9). The lowercase numeral is partly to help us distinguish Hobbes from Rousseau. My edition of *Leviathan* is the Hackett edition edited by Edwin Curley; all other citations from Hobbes—mostly from the collection of Hobbes's English Works edited by Sir William Molesworth—are given in footnotes.

The works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are cited from the 50-volume *Collected Works*, published by Lawrence and Wishart.[2] Each work is cited in the text by volume and page number. I use the abbreviation *MECW* as an indicator, so the first page of the *Communist Manifesto* is cited as (*MECW* 6: 481). Details of each volume will be given in a footnote the first time it is cited. It will usually be clear from context to which work I am referring, but where it is not clear I will put the title in the citation, for example (*Manifesto*, *MECW* 6: 481).

---

[2] The *Collected Works* Anglicises Engels's name, so he appears as Frederick Engels rather than Friedrich.

Introduction: The Ideal State and the History of Philosophy

This thesis is about the ideal state—the ideal *political* state, as opposed to an ideal state of affairs or an ideal state of being. There is an interesting relationship between an account of the ideal state and the context in which it was written. Many of those who offer an account of the ideal state characterise their project as a kind of scientific analysis. From certain assumptions about human nature it is possible, they think, to deduce the structure of the state which is ideally suited to that nature. The author might acknowledge that their ideal state could be applied locally, but they treat it as a general solution to the problem of how society should be organised. In so doing, they offer what I call a shining beacon on the hill: a more or less distant goal which provides an orientation for political change and a standard by which to compare and evaluate non-ideal societies. This is a fairly standard way of thinking about the ideal state. That a shining beacon account of the ideal state can account for local concerns should not be surprising, then; if an account of the ideal state is a general solution to political problems, then it must be able to solve problems in an author's local context—otherwise it is not general. On the shining beacon view, an account of the ideal state is sufficiently general that it can apply in any given local context. Thinking of the ideal state in this way can be useful, of that there is no question. However, the process is not quite so straightforward as the shining beacon view implies. Though human nature plays an important part in the construction of an ideal state, the structure of that state is also a reaction and response to local problems. The shining beacon view, as it stands, misses out this local dimension. On this local account, an ideal state can be read as a particular solution that might also apply generally. It can still be read as a general solution, but we are able to learn more about the structure of the ideal state if we take the local problems into account than if we read it only as a scientific account. Moreover, this way of thinking about ideal states is useful to us, and we ought to add it to our philosophical toolbox. I take the authors we are interested in to be sincere in their stated goals, and treat them as trying to posit a scientific shining beacon account of the ideal state. However, I argue that almost in spite of themselves the ideal state they propose is not a truly scientific solution, but springs from a particular solution to some problem or problems which they observe within their own historical context. I aim to demonstrate this by examining three case studies: Plato's *Republic* (4th Century BC); Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). I also use Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (1762) as illustrative examples.

There is an interesting ambiguity in the term "state" which could affect our understanding of just what counts as an account of the ideal state. On the one hand, "state" is used as a catch-all for virtually any form of political organisation. For example, the Greek word *polis* is usually translated as "city-state"; the period of Chinese history from c. 475-221 BC is often referred to as the Warring States period; and we can talk about the collapse of the Soviet State in the late 1980s and early 1990s. On the other hand, the term "State" (using a capital S to help distinguish it) designates a particular kind of political organisation with a particular history,[1] and defining it is surprisingly difficult.[2] We can call these the thick and thin concepts of the state, or the lowercase-s and uppercase-S states. The "state" in "ideal state" refers to the thin concept of the state, not the thick concept. There are two reasons for this. The earliest attempt to describe the ideal state—Plato's *Republic*—predates the historical origin of the State proper by about two millennia. More significantly, if we were to try and stretch the definition of the State to cover all the different political arrangements which have been proposed by ideal state theorists, the resulting concept would be so thin as to be useless. Indeed, it is possible for an ideal state to not meet any of the many possible definitions of a State. Marx and Engels's ideal state is a stateless society; in the ideal communist state, the State—in the sense of any form of centralised authority—ceases to exist. However, the fact that Marx and Engels posit a stateless society as the ideal does not entitle us to declare that they do not offer an account of the ideal state, though their status as ideal state theorists is somewhat controversial. The "state" of ideal state is simply a term of convenience.

0.1 The Central Argument

The central argument this thesis makes is that we have made a mistake in the way we think about the ideal state. The standard way of thinking about accounts of the ideal state assumes that they just offer a shining beacon on the hill. A shining beacon account of the ideal state is a description of a distant goal towards which we may want to move our existing political

---

[1] The State, sometimes referred to as the modern state, has only really existed since the seventeenth century. Colin Hay, Michael Lister, and David Marsh, eds., *The State: Theories and Issues* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 4-5.

[2] A consensus on what counts as a "State" is difficult to find; different definitions will be offered by historians, political scientists, lawyers, or philosophers. Erika Cudworth, Tim Hall, and John McGovern, *The Modern State : Theories and Ideologies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 1; Didier Fassin et al., *At the Heart of the State: The Moral World of Institutions*, trans. Patrick Brown and Didier Fassin (London: Pluto Press, 2015), ix.

societies; it is a general solution to the problem of social organisation. However, thinking of the ideal state as just a shining beacon does not tell the whole story. The missing part of this story is the author's reaction and response to what I call a local problem: some particular problem which is local to the time and place in which the account of the ideal state was written. In Plato's case, for example, a local problem is to be found in Athens in the late fifth century or early fourth century BC. The ideal state seeks to solve this local problem; it is constructed in such a way that the local problem cannot occur. More than this, I contend that an ideal state is directed towards a local problem even when its author is explicitly trying to posit a shining beacon account of the ideal state. That is, despite an author's stated intention that they are seeking a universal or somehow scientific account of political relations, the account they come up with will also solve a local problem in their own day; the author has a blind spot in their thinking and does not recognise that their solution, while potentially general in its application, is prompted by a particular state of affairs. It is important to remember that on the shining beacon account an ideal state offers a general solution that might apply locally; on this local problem account an ideal state offers a local solution that might apply generally. We can still think of the ideal state as a general solution to the problem of social organisation; it is still a shining beacon on the hill. What my argument offers is a way of understanding why the beacon has been placed on that particular hill. To make this argument I will begin by first examining two accounts of the ideal state where the focus on a local problem is reasonably well-known: Thomas More's *Utopia* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract*. These two base cases will allow us to explore the process by which an ideal state can be said to solve a local problem. It is interesting to note that More's local focus for his ideal society was probably deliberate; he used *Utopia* to comment on conditions in the England of his day. The application of Rousseau's *Social Contract* to mid-eighteenth century Geneva is perhaps not deliberate, though Rousseau did notice it after it was published—assuming that he was unaware of it earlier. Once we have explored these two base cases, we can apply the process to our three main case studies—*Republic*, *Leviathan*, and the *Communist Manifesto*—to explore how each of them responds to local conditions.

This way of thinking about the ideal state, not just as a scientifically derived general solution that might apply locally, but as a locally derived solution that might apply generally, is useful for two main reasons; I call these reasons the historical value and the political value. The historical value comes from exploring and understanding why the ideal state is structured as it is; on my account the structure of an ideal state reacts and responds to local problems, so

understanding how the ideal state compares with its historical context can reveal what an author considered to be a problem and the solutions to it. This way of looking at an ideal state reveals its author's motivations—even those motivations that were not conscious. There is value in not only knowing what someone thought, but why they thought as they did, and how they reached their conclusions. This offers a more interesting and complete picture of the past. This historical value is most obviously useful to historians of philosophy, but I contend that understanding the motivations behind some of the great works of Western philosophy is intrinsically valuable even outside this relatively narrow audience. A glance at the books on offer at any good bookshop would tend to support this claim.

In addition to this purely historical value, this way of thinking about the ideal state suggests that so-called "utopian" thinking—what is popularly understood as pie-in-the-sky day dreaming—is not as inherently impractical as it might seem. Allegedly scientific accounts of the ideal state reveal what is wrong with contemporary society as much as they provide a possible goal for political change. There are two arguments to be made here: the first is that we ought not to dismiss utopian thinking as inherently impractical; the second is that we can use ideal states, a species of utopian thought, to make comparisons between local problems and their solutions. Other comparisons can of course be made, but what the local problem conception of ideal state theory allows us to do is to compare solutions to similar problems. For example, one of the problems which Plato's ideal state seeks to resolve is the problem of expertise in politics. His solution is to put political power in the hands of experts—the philosopher-kings—and to divorce economic and political power entirely. When we consider the influence of corporations in politics in our own day, especially in the United States, some of Plato's reasoning in *Republic* might be more obviously applicable than it initially seems. We do not discuss the political value described here much in the body of the thesis; most of the text is concerned with exploring the local problems that our authors attempt to solve. In the Conclusion we will address the political value more directly.

I should take a moment to clarify just what I mean by a local problem. Many of us would agree that the ideal state in Hobbes's *Leviathan*, for instance, is offered in an attempt to work out how best to maintain peace—or, to put it another way, how to solve the problem of maintaining peace. How can this be a local problem? If there is any such thing as a *universal* political problem, then it is the problem of how to effectively maintain peace. Maintaining

4

peace becomes a local problem in a particular historical context. The peace in Hobbes's lifetime was most dramatically disturbed by the English Civil Wars (1642-1651). The argument is that Hobbes's ideal state responds to the tensions and problems which caused that particular conflict, and his ideal state aims to render that conflict impossible. The local problem is not simply that peace was disturbed; the problem is how it was disturbed, its causes, course, and consequences. A local problem is often a specific instance of a more general phenomenon. If Hobbes had only been solving a universal political problem based on a theory of human nature, his ideal state would probably have looked very different to *Leviathan*; for example, he might conceivably have steered towards democracy as a way of avoiding conflict. It is the particular events which Hobbes observed which gives his ideal state its particular characteristics. Even the lead-up to a civil war is local; had Hobbes been writing in nineteenth-century America before their civil war, his ideal state would be grappling with a different local problem, though perhaps an instance of the same universal problem. In Chapter 1, I introduce the distinction between a scientific theory and a model, which will help to make this universal-particular distinction more clear.

The same question might apply to the local problems I identify in this thesis. These local problems are conceivably perennial political problems, and so aren't truly local at all. For example, one of the problems Plato's ideal state grapples with is the effect of private interests on the public interest; the public interest can sometimes be suppressed in favour of satisfying private interests. That is indeed a perennial political problem. As above, though, what makes it local is the particular formulation of the problem; it is the way that private and public interests conflicted in Plato's Athens that is of interest to us.

It is possible to describe almost all the ideal states we will examine as solving general political problems. Plato provides a way of working out who ought to rule, and why; More solves the problem of greed; Hobbes tackles disagreement; Rousseau solves questions about the nature of sovereignty and delegated authority. Marx and Engels are trickier to pin down. The Marxian ideal state can be said to respond to the general problem of industrial capitalism, but it is hardly as general a problem as disagreement or greed. It is hard to remove their ideal state from its historical context, because Marx and Engels ground it in a strongly historical account. The other ideal states we are interested in are all more or less ahistorical, making them much more generally applicable. This is one of several interesting contrasts between

Marx and Engels and the other authors we are interested in; we will encounter more of these contrasts in Chapter 5.

Throughout this thesis I describe philosophers as "intending" to solve a local problem, or that an account of the ideal state "aims" to solve a local problem, and so on. I should make clear that this is just for convenience. I do not think that philosophers who propose ideal states take themselves to be directing their attention to local problems; indeed I think the opposite is generally true. Most ideal states are framed as a scientific or quasi-scientific enquiry into the laws of political relations. The point is, however, that almost in spite of themselves, an ideal state will nevertheless be concerned with a local problem. Therefore, phrases like "Plato aims to . . ." should not be taken to express a deliberate intent on Plato's part. It is worth noting that, even if I did think the focus on a local problem was deliberate, it would in most cases be impossible to prove. Indeed, as Glenn Burgess points out, trying to reconstruct intentionality is extremely complex, and it is probably impossible to know just what an author thought they were doing at each point during the composition of a text.[3]

0.2 Methodology

This project is broadly in the philosophical tradition of contextualism, commonly associated with the so-called Cambridge School, of which Quentin Skinner is probably the best-known member. Contextualism is best described as the attempt to locate an author in their historical milieu.[4] But there are, broadly speaking, two pure forms of studying the history of political thought, which Neal Wood calls the philosophical form and the historical form.[5] The philosophical form approaches a philosophical text as a text; it concentrates on the relationships of the words, propositions, and ideas as expressed in the text. In this way, the author is treated as though they are a contemporary of ours, and we engage in a discussion with them. The historical form seeks to situate a text in its historical context, and to explore the relationship between a thinker's ideas and the world in which they lived. These two positions may usefully be thought of as the extremes of a continuum, and philosophers can occupy different positions along it, taking a stronger or weaker methodological approach

---

[3] Glenn Burgess, "Contexts for the Writing and Publication of Hobbes's *Leviathan*," *History of Political Thought* 11, no. 4 (1990): 683.

[4] Mark Bevir, "The Contextualist Approach," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. George Klosko (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11.

[5] Neal Wood, *John Locke and Agrarian Capitalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 1-2.

depending upon their relative distance from the extreme. The extreme of the historical approach, as Wood describes it, rests on the assumption that 'the meaning of a classic text can be established only if it is firmly situated in the appropriate social, political, and economic context and the relationship between the theorist's realm of ideas and the world of action in which they lived and wrote is carefully defined'.[6] That is a strong position. To take that approach would require very careful examination of documents, philosophical and historical, and a rigorous, painstaking examination of the texts. This project is a broad one, seeking to consider five towering figures in the history of philosophy and their relationship to the times in which they lived. Such painstaking attention to detail will not be feasible in the space we have available. This is one reason why I take a weakly historical position; another is that I think the extreme of the historical end of the continuum is too strong. I do not think that putting a work in context is a necessary condition for establishing its meaning. Rather, I hold that putting a work into context can help us to understand parts of it better than if we just consider it on its own merits. Both approaches have their uses, depending upon what we are seeking to achieve. If, for example, we are interested in how a text fits together as a piece of argument, or how elements of it develop from earlier passages or earlier texts, then this seems to call for a philosophical approach. If, on the other hand, we are interested in how a work was constructed, and how features of the world of action might have influenced some of the author's decision-making, then we might choose to take a historical approach. Therefore, I lean towards the historical approach but it is not a strong methodological position, nor does it seek to dismiss the usefulness of the philosophical approach.

Whether we prefer a historical or a philosophical approach, exploring the history of philosophy can be useful. A.C. Grayling describes the history of philosophy as a vast conversation among philosophers who have been interested in the same fundamental questions across time; knowing the 'case law' of these debates is important if we want to understand them.[7] Daniel C. Dennett describes it as 'in large measure the history of very smart people making very tempting mistakes, and if you don't know the history, you are doomed to making the same darn mistakes all over again'.[8] The history of philosophy is perhaps not essential to philosophy in that it is perfectly possible to do good philosophy

---

[6] Ibid, 2.
[7] A.C. Grayling, *The History of Philosophy* (London: Penguin, 2019), xviii.
[8] Daniel C. Dennett, *Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Thinking* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2013), 19.

without engaging with its history, but the history of philosophy offers important opportunities to learn from the past, both its successes and its failures. If we characterise learning from the history of philosophy as learning from earlier successes, then we are seeking to do philosophy on the shoulders of giants; we recognise that our intellectual forebears have made certain advances, and we seek to further those advances. Learning from earlier failures in philosophy imagines philosophy as an immense minefield, where earlier thinkers' 'moribund corpses flag the still present peril'.[9] The importance of the history of philosophy is fundamentally the same as the importance of any history: knowing where we have come from helps us to understand where we are and where we are going.[10] Even more than this, historical figures are in many cases seeking to answer the same questions as philosophers in the present, and may have devised superior tools to do so. If we are to take the best lessons from the history of philosophy, it is important that we understand not only *what* a thinker thought, but that we reconstruct as best we can *why* they thought as they did, what brought them to the conclusions they reached, and any blind spots in their thinking which they may have had. This is what I aim to do in this thesis.

One of the features of studying the history of philosophy in the way I have outlined is that we often need to do an awful lot of history. In this project especially, the historical record is of vital importance; I rely on the history to support the philosophical argument I am making. There are two important things the history helps us to do. In order to demonstrate how a given ideal state solves a particular local problem, we first need to understand why it is a problem. We should be reasonably clear on what has gone wrong, in the author's view, in their historical context. We also need to understand how the ideal state solves that local problem. We should be able to see that the local problem could not occur in the ideal state. Carefully studying the historical context allows us to do both of these things.

In this project I rely chiefly on secondary historical sources to reconstruct the course of events and to understand their importance. This is partly due to the breadth of material we need to cover; to reconstruct events from primary sources would require more time than we have available. Primarily, though, I have chosen to rely on secondary sources because I do

---

[9] Roy Mash, "How Important for Philosophers Is the History of Philosophy?," *History and Theory* 26, no. 3 (1987): 295.

[10] Richard A. Watson, "What Is the History of Philosophy and Why Is It Important?," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40, no. 4 (2002): 527.

not have the historical authority to interpret events. My claim to originality is in the history of philosophy, not in history. Reconstructing the course and importance of events—especially the importance—from primary sources would take greater historical authority and more space than I am able to provide, especially in a project of this breadth.

0.3 Ideal State and Ideal Theory

We should acknowledge that the ideal state is no longer a focus for philosophers. Much current scholarly discussion is framed in terms of ideal (and nonideal) theory, concepts which were introduced by John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*. Ideal theory (as in an ideal theory of justice) works out the principles which characterise a 'well-ordered society' under ideal conditions.[11] Nonideal theory is the application of ideal theory to the real world, asking which principles we should retain when ideal conditions can no longer be assumed.[12] The difference between ideal state theory and ideal theory is that whereas the former prescribes certain institutions, arguing that these particular institutions will result in the best possible political society, the latter prescribes certain principles which a society should meet in order to be fully just, but says little about the institutional form of that society; there may be more than one way of meeting the principles prescribed by the theory of justice. Ideal/nonideal theory is less rigid in its prescriptions than ideal state theory, which perhaps makes it better able to cope with differing political opinions and conceptions of the good society.

This would seem to provoke the question of why a focus on ideal state theory is warranted, given that we have an alternative which seems to be more useful. Above I indicated the historical value and the political value that this thesis provides—as an aside I think it is likely that ideal theory will have the same or very similar kinds of value. The main value of ideal state theory is no doubt historical, and to help demonstrate the political value it is useful to use texts that are relatively old to ensure good historical perspective. Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, published in 1971, is still relatively recent, whereas the most recent work we examine in this thesis is *The Communist Manifesto*, published in 1848.

---

[11] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 245.
[12] Ibid., 246.

0.4 Summary of the Text

The overall argument is that an account of the ideal state is not based only on some assumptions about human nature, but it is also a particular solution to a local problem. To understand why the ideal state has the structure it does, we should take note of the local application. But before we can explore the way individual ideal states react and respond to their particular contexts, we need to start by working out just what an "ideal state" is. This is the focus of Chapter 1. Ideal state theory is not often discussed, especially nowadays, and there are a number of assumptions we have made about the ideal state which, on close examination, turn out not to be justified. There is also a tendency to use the term "utopia" as though it is interchangeable with "ideal state". For our purposes they are more or less interchangeable, but utopianism takes a slightly different approach to describing the ideal society which is worth exploring. Towards the end of this chapter I use the distinction between a scientific theory and a model to help us understand what an account of the ideal state will look like, and what it is trying to achieve.

We are exploring the difference between what an author *says* they are doing, and what they are *actually* doing. At the beginning of each chapter, we will briefly discuss how the relevant author describes their own project, starting at Chapter 2. There are two things to talk about here, which we might call an author's intentions and their expectations for their project. The author's intention is the project they are engaged in; for our authors this is some variation on seeking to describe the ideal state. The author's expectation is what end, if any, they foresee for their project; it is the use to which they expect their work to be put. We can think of intentions and expectations as asking the questions "what is this author trying to do?' and "why are they trying to do it?", respectively. We will find that there is a trend of seeking *the* answer to political questions. Each author approaches their project differently, but there is a fairly consistent attitude of engaging in a scientific or quasi-scientific process. From some assumptions about human nature the supposedly best state is derived, purportedly independent of the author's own interests—taking 'men as they are and laws as they can be', as Rousseau puts it.[13]

---

[13] This is at least implicitly normative: we derive ought from is, and think that if this is the objectively best state, then we ought to emulate it as much as possible.

Another feature of these texts we will briefly explore in each chapter is their reception. The way the texts we are interested in were received and understood by their contemporaries—popular audiences and other intellectuals alike—is potentially revealing of how the local problem was understood to affect the ideal state. In general, audiences tended to take the philosophical approach to the ideal states we will explore, which is interesting.

In Chapter 2 we explore two examples of the ideal state—More's *Utopia* and Rousseau's *Social Contract*—which are acknowledged by scholars as solving local problems. This will show just how an account of the ideal state can be said to solve a local problem, which we can then apply to the three case study texts. More's *Utopia* is deliberately applying the ideal state to local conditions. He is using the ideal society to criticise what he views as greed run amuck in England, in particular taking issue with the enclosure movement, in which formerly. collectively-owned land was converted to privately-owned land, usually for pasture. This forced many people into poverty as they were unable to access their traditional lands for support. More's solution is to posit a society in which private property does not exist, there is no money economy, and everyone shares in working towards the common good. Rousseau contributes to an ongoing conversation about eighteenth-century Genevan identity. It is less clear whether the local application of his ideal state was deliberate. There was a major debate in Geneva about whether or not political authority could be delegated, and if it was whether that delegation could be revoked. Rousseau's ideal state solves the problem through the way the government is structured, and thanks to his insistence on the general will as the guiding principle of politics.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to Plato's *Republic*. We will examine Plato's ideal city, and compare it with the Athens of his day. Plato seeks to put political power in the hands of experts, those who are naturally suited to wield political power. There are a number of episodes from the Peloponnesian War which illustrate the problems which Plato aims to solve. These are useful because there is relatively limited evidence which has survived since Plato's day, so to a certain extent our conclusions about Plato will be somewhat speculative.

In Chapter 4 we examine Hobbes's *Leviathan* and the lead up to the English Civil War. Hobbes is interested in the power of the Sovereign—which does not have to be a single individual—to protect the people from the state of nature, which for Hobbes is a condition of war of all against all. Hobbes puts the power of sovereignty firmly in the lap of King Charles

I, and attempts to prove that the sovereign power cannot be divided—for when it was divided, as it was in England before the Civil War, the consequences were appalling.

Finally, in Chapter 5 we turn to Marx and Engels, the *Communist Manifesto*, and social conditions in the mid-nineteenth century. Some scholars hold that Marx and Engels are not ideal state theorists at all; they might be engaged in an interesting political project, but, on this account, they do not have a theory of the ideal state. We address this briefly in Chapter 2, and then in more depth in Chapter 5. Marx and Engels create an ideal state which addresses the philosophical problem of alienated labour and the historical problem of social conditions in the mid-nineteenth century. Their solution, famously, is the communist society where the state as we know it ceases to exist.

In the Conclusion we will turn to the political value we identified earlier; that thinking of the ideal state as a particular solution that might apply generally can be useful to us. There are two aspects to this: utopian thinking is not inherently impractical and ideal states have a comparative element that can be useful in addressing contemporary political problems.

1. The Idea of the Ideal State

We start our investigation of the ideal state by examining what it means for a state to be ideal. Conversations about the ideal state—when they occur at all—tend to be about somebody's particular version of it, whether that is Plato's ideal state,[1] or Thomas More's ideal state,[2] or Hegel's,[3] or Ghandi's,[4] and so on. The term is rarely considered on its own in abstract or general terms. We might think there is no need for a sustained discussion. If a travel company were to advertise an ideal holiday, for instance, they would not need to explain what that means; we all know what a holiday is, so we would want a description of this allegedly-ideal holiday so that we can decide for ourselves whether or not it is *actually* ideal. On this view, there is nothing to be gained by unpacking the ideal state in the abstract; rather we want a description of this or that particular ideal state, so that we may judge whether or not it is actually ideal. This assumes that the definition of a state is not controversial, which could be open to challenge, as we saw in the Introduction. It also assumes that we know what counts as ideal; we might think that we will know it when we see it. But, apart from this, it seems to me that the term "ideal state" is not so obviously clear as it first appears, likely because we have treated it as just described, and have not subjected it to a careful examination. It will be useful to lay out exactly what our assumptions about the ideal state are, and to clarify them if we can.

Working out the general characteristics of an account of the ideal state, and examining some of our assumptions about such accounts, to see if they are justified, will enable us to describe what we might call the standard view of ideal state theory; I argue that the standard view does not tell the whole story. To make our investigation easier, I will take a paradigm example of the ideal state to talk about. Most of us, if not all, would agree that Plato's *Republic* does contain an account of the ideal state, so it will make for an excellent paradigm case. The ideal state can be generally described as a model of the best possible political arrangement, towards which we might aspire. There is quite a bit to unpack here, and we will deal with each element of this in turn. We will then explore how ideal state theory has been

---

[1] Douwe Fokkema, *Perfect Worlds: Utopian Fiction in China and the West* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011).

[2] Ibid., 38.

[3] Pheng Chea, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

[4] Janardan Pandey, "Democratic Ideal State and the Hind Swaraj," *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 1 (1988).

described—which is usually very briefly, when it is discussed at all—in order to codify and evaluate our assumptions about it.

Let us start with the term "ideal state" itself. The term as we are using it is of relatively recent origin; it first appeared in English in the late eighteenth century. In what claims to be a translation of Diogenes of Sinope's dialogues, the character of Diogenes hurls the accusation at Plato, his interlocutor, that 'to promote the common interest of thy ideal state, thou annihilatest all those feelings, by which the common good becomes interesting to each individual'.[5] The word "ideal" is much older: it derives originally from *idea* in the Platonic sense—that is, Form—and descends to English via the Latin *idealis*, "existing in idea", thus it has the sense of 'pertaining to an archetype or model'.[6] It has connotations of perfection and impossibility—as in the contrast between realism and idealism, for instance—as well as being used to refer, more loosely, to an evaluative standard.[7] It will be interesting to see to what extent these connotations can be found in *Republic*. The ideal state is further ideal in that it is *idealised*. That is, the state is abstracted, and the author selects some features to focus on and others to leave assumed. As in John Rawls's ideal theory, ideal state theorists often assume strict compliance and favourable conditions as background to their account of the ideal state.[8] Strict compliance is the assumption that everyone—or nearly everyone— obeys and abides by the principles of justice, or in this case the institutions which the ideal state prescribes.[9] The idealised nature of the ideal state is important, as we will see later. The connotations of the word "ideal" give us some of the assumptions we make about the ideal state. With this in mind, let us now turn to *Republic*.[10]

We are using *Republic* as our paradigm example of an account of the ideal state to help us identify its general features. We can start by seeing what Plato's overall project is. The question Socrates is tasked with answering is 'what justice and injustice are and what power

---

[5] Christoph Martin Wieland, *Socrates out of His Senses: Or Dialogues of Diogenes of Sinope*, trans. Mr Wintersted, vol. II (Newburgh: D. Denniston, 1797), 92. Originally published 1771.
[6] Online Etymology Dictionary. "Idea (Adj.)," 2019, accessed May 2019, https://www.etymonline.com/word/ideal.
[7] Zofia Stemplowska and Adam Swift, "Ideal and Nonideal Theory," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, ed. David Estlund (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 374.
[8] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 245.
[9] Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 13.
[10] A word to those who are not used to reading Plato. The text is a dialogue, in which Socrates appears as a character. Throughout, I will say that "Socrates says . . ." and "Plato says . . ."; this should not be thought of as referring to two different authors, but only when I am talking about the character and the author.

each itself has when it's by itself in the soul' (*Republic*, II.358b).[11] That is, the interlocutors are trying to work out what characterises a just individual. In order to make this task easier (for Socrates confesses that he and the other interlocutors 'aren't clever people' (II.368d)), Socrates suggests they 'first find out what sort of thing justice is in a city and afterwards look for it in the individual, observing the ways in which the smaller is similar to the larger' (II.368e-369a). He claims that this is like being asked to read small letters at a distance but noticing that there is a larger version of the same letters closer at hand; it will be much less difficult to identify the larger letters than the smaller. To create those larger letters—to find justice in the city—Socrates describes the arrangement of an imaginary city-state. We will save the details of the ideal city for later; for now it is sufficient to note that Socrates describes a political arrangement. An account of the ideal state, then, is a description of some kind of political arrangement.

The arrangement Plato describes in *Republic* does not look like any then-existing society. But we should not expect it to be; if Plato decided in the end that the ideal state closely resembled Athens or Sparta, we would probably suspect him of being disingenuous. Searching for justice in the city—and justice 'by itself in the soul'—is seeking justice, 'itself by itself with itself' (*Symposium* 221b).[12] No earthly city could reach such a standard. Hence the ideal state must be somehow different to the way things actually are. Given that the interlocutors are trying to create a city which maximises justice and virtue, we can safely rule out the possibility that they will set out to construct an ideal state which is *worse* than the way things actually are. The ideal will certainly be better than existing society, indeed substantially better. Plato concludes that the city constructed in *Republic*, 'if indeed it has been correctly founded, is *completely good*' (IV.427e, my emphasis). The Greek is *teleōs agathēn*, which has been alternatively translated as '*perfectly* good'.[13] We will discuss later whether or not we should expect the ideal state to be perfect. It is enough for now to think of the ideal state as much better than any existing political society.

---

[11] We might contrast this with the later project of the *Laws*, which seeks to describe the second-best state.

[12] In *Symposium*, Plato is talking about the Form of Beauty, which he tells us 'is not beautiful this way and ugly that way, nor beautiful at one time and ugly at another, not beautiful in relation to one thing and ugly in relation to another . . . itself by itself with itself, it is always one in form; and all the other beautiful things share in that, in such a way that when those others come to be or pass away, this does not become the least bit smaller or greater nor suffer any change'.

[13] Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, Second ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1991). My emphasis.

Though the project is to create a better society, it must be grounded in some (broadly) realistic assumptions. W.K.C. Guthrie points out that an ideal state could be a society of perfect individuals or 'the best conceivable organisation for men as they are'.[14] To help us decide which of these options is more likely, we should remember that Plato's project is to work out what justice is 'by itself in the soul'; the letters analogy allows him to first define justice in the city. If the big letters of the city are to be any help, they must reflect human nature as it actually is.[15] Thus, Plato assumes that justice in the city and justice in the individual are more or less the same thing—the former being the latter writ large—and he further assumes that 'each of us differs somewhat in nature from the others, one being suited to one task, another to another' (II.370a-b). I call this the principle of specialisation; Plato assumes that each of us is naturally suited to one profession. Plato's account of the ideal state is based on assumptions about the way people actually are—or, at least, the way Plato thinks people actually are. The sophistication of these assumptions does not need strict criteria: one account of the ideal state might posit a fully-fledged theory of human nature while another might make only a few broad assumptions. Further, the assumptions which some theorists make will be very realistic, all things being equal, while other theorists' assumptions may be less plausible. For instance, both of Plato's assumptions could be questioned, though we will not examine them here. Indeed, Baruch de Spinoza attacks philosophers who 'believe they perform a godly act and reach the pinnacle of wisdom when they've learned how to praise in many ways a human nature which doesn't exist anywhere'. In constructing ideal states, Spinoza thinks philosophers have a tendency to 'conceive men not as they are, but as they want them to be'.[16] The ideal state is based on assumptions about how people actually are, and this is distinctive of ideal states as opposed to other, less realistic, ways of describing the ideal society.

As well as making realistic assumptions about people, the ideal state must also take nature as it is; the ideal state idealises organisation, not people or nature.[17] If we do idealise nature (leaving people alone for now), the account of the ideal society we come up with will be like the medieval Cockaygne, with rivers of wine and buildings made of food free for the taking.

---

[14] W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Ancient Greek Philosophy Volume Four: Plato the Man and His Dialogues, Earlier Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 449.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Baruch de Spinoza, "Political Treatise," in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. Edwin Curley, vol. 2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), I, i.

[17] J.C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing, 1516-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 38.

If we only idealise people, we end up in a society of morally perfect individuals; if both are idealised we end up somewhere like the Biblical Garden of Eden (before the serpent's intervention, of course). Idealising people or nature is more the realm of science fiction or fantasy than it is political philosophy. An account of the ideal state should not require nature to be more than ordinarily beneficent, nor should it require people to be more than ordinarily virtuous.[18]

By now we have identified, in broad strokes at least, the notable traits of an account of the ideal state. We might wonder whether the ideal state is an ideal which can be realised completely, in all its details, or whether it is best understood as a regulative ideal; that is, a goal which can be approached but can never be quite achieved—an asymptotic ideal, perhaps.[19] Plato seems to endorse this latter view: 'is it possible to do anything in practice the same as in theory? Or is it the nature of practice to grasp truth less well than theory does?' (V.472e-473a).[20] Socrates asks Glaucon not to

> compel me to show that what we've described in theory can come into being exactly as we've described it. Rather, if we're able to discover how a city could come to be governed in a way that most closely approximates our description, let's say that we've shown what you ordered us to show, namely, that it's possible for our city to come to be. Or wouldn't you be satisfied with that? *I* would be satisfied with it (V.473a-b).

Plato's ideal city might not be realisable in every detail, but it can be approximated more or less closely.[21] In *Laws*, Plato comments that 'reflection and experience will soon show that the organisation of a state is almost bound to fall short of the ideal' (*Laws* V.739a). Some theorists might dispute that the ideal state is a regulative ideal; Hobbes, for instance, gives no indication that he expects his ideal state in *Leviathan* to be realised in anything less than its totality. Interestingly, Dorothy Emmet—who wrote the book on regulative ideals—is one of those who disagrees: she argues that the ideal state is only an *ersatz* regulative ideal on the basis that no particular community—and an account of the ideal state describes a particular community—can be a regulative ideal.[22] For Emmett, a regulative ideal must be general.

---

[18] Simon Herbert, "Identifying Utopia," *Thomas Project: a border journal for utopian thoughts*, no. 2 (2019): 110.

[19] Dorothy Emmet, *The Role of the Unrealisable: A Study in Regulative Ideals* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 2. Immanuel Kant contrasts regulative and constitutive principles. The former are used in reflection on experience, the latter are the objective principles of the world. A regulative ideal provides an archetypal standard by which we can regulate activity. Ibid., 10-11.

[20] As we will see later, even this ideal can at best be realised for only a limited period.

[21] Donald R. Morrison, "The Utopian Character of Plato's Ideal City," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 234.

[22] Emmet, *Unrealisable*, 48.

However, given that ideal states are idealised, as noted above, it seems extremely unlikely that any actual society could come to resemble the ideal state in all its details, for in a non-ideal situation strict compliance can no longer be taken for granted, nor can we assume circumstances will always be favourable—which is the scenario Plato contemplates in *Laws*. Any society which is created by humans 'can only be a poor reflection of the ideal, and it must fail'.[23] There might *potentially* be a case where an ideal state could be fully realised in the real world, but the likelihood is vanishingly small. Therefore, it is best to treat the ideal state as a regulative ideal.

Given that a regulative ideal will always be just out of reach, we might worry about how it can be of any use to us. There are two good non-philosophical examples of regulative (or possibly regulative) ideals which we can nevertheless find useful. Martin Luther King Jr's "I Have A Dream" speech serves to illustrate the point, though the speech in its entirety may not offer a regulative ideal. Probably the most famous line from that speech says, 'I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character'.[24] King's vision of a just society has not yet been reached—and may never be reached. But it serves as an ideal towards which we want to aim, and get as close to as we can. Even though that ideal might be ultimately unreachable, the ideal orients current political demands.[25] This is what Gerald Gaus calls the orienting function of the ideal, which does two things: it identifies the ideal, and enables us to make comparative judgements of less-than-ideal states relative to that ideal.[26] The second example of a useful regulative ideal is the so-called Vision Zero project, which began in Sweden in 1997, and has since spread across Europe and the United States;[27] indeed, in December 2019 the New Zealand government adopted a Road to Zero policy based on Vision Zero.[28] The Vision Zero project has the long-term goal of eliminating all traffic fatalities. The long-term character of the goal can help to co-ordinate both long and short-term action and, therefore, may be more effective than more theoretically realistic goal-setting of (say)

---

[23] Lyman Tower Sargent, *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 17.
[24] Martin Luther King, Jr. "I Have a Dream," 1963, accessed May 2019,
 https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech/pdf.
[25] Gerald Gaus, *The Tyranny of the Ideal: Justice in a Diverse Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 12.
[26] Ibid., 5.
[27] Vision Zero Network. "What Is Vision Zero?," accessed May 2019,
 https://visionzeronetwork.org/about/what-is-vision-zero/.
[28] Ministry of Transport. "Road to Zero: A New Road Safety Strategy for NZ," accessed August 2020,
 https://www.transport.govt.nz/multi-modal/keystrategiesandplans/road-safety-strategy/.

reducing the road toll by 20% in 2021, then once this has been achieved, setting another 20% reduction target for 2022, and so on.[29] Since we live under non-ideal conditions, it will be impossible—or virtually impossible—to completely eliminate traffic fatalities; accidents happen, after all. But the ideal helps us to orient meaningful change and motivate efforts to move our current reality closer to that ideal.[30] Though we may never get very close to the ideal, it is still able to act as a guide for future action. Therefore we need not be concerned that a regulative ideal can never be realised completely.

1.1 Shining Beacon on the Hill

This general description of the ideal state—a better society which is based on certain assumptions about the way people and nature actually are, and which we want to emulate as much as possible—gives us what seems to be the standard view of ideal state theory in the secondary literature. I describe this metaphorically: the ideal state is represented as a shining beacon on the hill, which gives us an orientation and goal for political change. Karl Popper gives a good description of the shining beacon view, which is worth quoting at length. Popper describes what he calls the 'Utopian' approach to politics as follows:

> Any rational action must have a certain aim. It is rational in the same degree as it pursues its aim consciously and consistently, and as it determines its means according to this end. To choose the end is therefore the first thing we have to do if we wish to act rationally; and we must be careful to determine our real or ultimate ends, from which we must distinguish clearly those intermediate or partial ends which actually are only means, or steps on the way to the ultimate end. If we neglect this distinction, then we must also neglect to ask whether these partial ends are likely to promote the ultimate end, and accordingly, we must fail to act rationally. These principles, if applied to the realm of political activity, demand that we must determine our ultimate political aim, or the Ideal State, before taking any practical action. Only when this ultimate aim is determined, in rough outline at least, only when we are in possession of something like a blueprint of the society at which we aim, only then can we begin to consider the best ways and means for its realisation, and to draw up a plan for practical action.[31]

---

[29] Eva Erman and Niklas Möller, "Three Failed Charges against Ideal Theory," *Social Theory and Practice* 39, no. 1 (2013): 31.

[30] Julian W. Fernando et al., "Functions of Utopia: How Utopian Thinking Motivates Societal Engagement," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 44, no. 5 (2018): 779-80. This brings to mind the line from Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*: 'nothing excels dreams as a begetter of the future. Today's Utopia is the flesh and blood of tomorrow'. Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* (London: Penguin, 1982), 555.

[31] Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies I: The Spell of Plato*, Fifth ed. (London: Kegan Paul, 1966), 157.

It should be noted that Popper is no fan of this view. Whether we need a 'blueprint' for the society at which we aim is questionable; this is discussed below. Krishan Kumar also offers an excellent encapsulation of the standard view of ideal state theory, again worth quoting at length.

> It is in the 'ideal constitution' tradition of Bodin (*La République*), Hobbes (*Leviathan*), Harrington (*Oceana*), Locke (*The Second Treatise of Government*) and Rousseau (*The Social Contract*) that we should look for the deepest Platonic influence. What all these offer are prescriptive models of the ideal political constitution. They lay down in opening chapters ('Of Man', 'Of Nature', etc.) various postulates, propositions and presumptions about the nature of man and society. They then deduce or derive from these general propositions the principles of the best state or the 'natural' order of society.[32]

Other theorists seem to share this view of ideal state theory, telling us that 'right from the beginning political philosophy has sought to describe the ideal state, which, even if not fully achievable, gives us guidance in constructing a more just social world'.[33] Ingrid Robeyns describes ideal theory metaphorically as 'a mythical *Paradise Island*'. We have heard marvellous stories about this island, but we do not know where it is, and there are some who deny its existence altogether. Despite this, we want to go there if we can, and ask in what direction we ought to be moving in order to eventually reach Paradise Island.[34] The difficulty of this task is not to be understated. Having a reasonably realistic picture of the ideal is one thing, but working out how to move our current societies closer to that ideal is quite another.[35] But, if we are able to orient on an ideal, the hope is that we are moving in the right direction.[36] These are the two key features of the shining beacon view: the ideal state is a (distant) goal, and we orient on it in order to bring our existing societies closer to that goal.

The characteristics of an account of the ideal state as we have identified them give rise to a possible objection, worth considering. We might think that the United States Constitution—as it was in 1787, after the Constitutional Convention had completed it but before it had been ratified by the states—offers a counterexample to this description of an ideal state. It seems that the Constitution describes a better political society and meets all the criteria which we have discussed so far. If this description is sufficient for an ideal state, then it seems that the

---

[32] Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 25.
[33] Gaus, *Tyranny*, 3.
[34] Ingrid Robeyns, "Ideal Theory in Theory and Practice," *Social Theory and Practice* 34, no. 3 (2008): 344-45. Robeyns' emphasis.
[35] Stemplowska and Swift, "Ideal and Nonideal Theory," 379.
[36] Gaus, *Tyranny*, 4.

Constitution qualifies as an account of the ideal state. Yet, if these criteria for ideal state theory are to be acceptable, we must rule out the Constitution, for intuitively we would say it is not an account of the *ideal* state, but an account of an *actual* state. It fails to qualify as an ideal state for two reasons. So far I have been talking about the ideal state as describing a better society. For clarity, let us maximise that condition to talk about the best possible society—which we will discuss in more detail later on, when we consider whether or not the ideal state will be perfect. In this context, best possible means the best account available given certain constraints. In accounts of the ideal state, that is best possible given the constraints of realistic assumptions about the way people and nature actually are. The *absolute* best possible society would presumably be one in which everyone was perfectly virtuous, within the bounds of human nature and nature was infinitely benevolent, and examples of such societies are very difficult to find. The Constitution, however, does not have to manage only those constraints. The Constitution is the best possible political arrangement on which the delegates at the Constitutional Convention could agree. In order to make it as palatable as possible to all the delegates the Constitution contains some significant compromises. Probably the most famous is the somewhat notorious three-fifths compromise in Article One, Section 2, which determines population by 'adding to the whole Number of free Persons . . . three fifths of all other Persons'.[37] Those 'other Persons' are, of course, slaves; the euphemism illustrates the embarrassing position of having to recognise slavery in the Constitution as an established institution.[38] The population determines the number of representatives in Congress, as well as the level of federal taxes each state has to pay. Given that slaves made up some forty percent of the population of Virginia, for instance, this is a substantial concession,[39] which James Madison describes in *The Federalist Papers* as 'evidently the least objectionable among the practicable rules'.[40] "Least objectionable" and "best possible" are hardly synonymous.

Further, while an account of the ideal state is perhaps intended to be implemented, it is presented as a more or less distant goal to be eventually achieved. Plato's *Republic*, for instance, would require some fairly serious reform before its vision could be realised, because

---

[37] Jack N. Rakove, ed., *The Annotated U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 111.

[38] Ibid., 110.

[39] Ron Chernow, *Washington: A Life* (London: Penguin, 2010), 536.

[40] James Madison, "The Federalist No. 54: The Apportionment of Members of the House of Representatives among the States," in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Alexander Hamilton, et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 277.

it relies upon a detailed programme of education which would need to be implemented before the ideal state could be realised. That is, people need to be changed, or moulded, somewhat before the ideal state can come into being. The Constitution, on the other hand, is not a distant goal: it is intended to be implemented *right now*, and amended as needed—or a new Constitution adopted as necessary—as people change over time. Thus, the Constitution of the United States—or any constitution—does not describe an ideal state.

1.2 The Good Place: Utopia and the Ideal State

Before we examine the ideal state's features in more depth, I want to consider another influential tradition of thinking about the ideal society. So far, I have been using "ideal state" and "utopia" as interchangeable terms, which is not uncommon in the literature. For our purposes the two terms are more or less synonymous, but it is worth examining where they diverge. The word "utopia" was coined by Thomas More in 1516, as both the title of his book and the name of the island described therein; "utopia" is famously a pun on the Greek words for "no-place" (*ou*topia) and "good-place" (*eu*topia). The ambiguity of the title is probably intentional,[41] creating a significant tension which cannot be eliminated.[42] Colloquially, the words "utopia" and "ideal" share connotations of perfection and impossibility—particularly impossibility. Utopia is equated with an unrealistic or impossible daydream, and is often used as an insult or pejorative. Utopian speculation, in this sense, is pie-in-the-sky daydreaming, and intrinsically impractical.[43] This pejorative sense is not entirely absent from scholarly discussion, either; Thomas Nagel argues that an ideal is utopian if real people cannot be motivated to live by it,[44] suggesting utopia is concerned with flights of fancy and uninterested in reality. Laura Valentini describes utopian theories of justice as uninterested in 'factual constraints'.[45] If a theory is utopian, the thought goes, it cannot be directly turned into policy for any existing society.[46] I will set this use of the term aside to focus on the literary tradition. This means also excluding utopian ideologies or communal movements, at least for the

---

[41] Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 708.

[42] Fátima Vieira, "The Concept of Utopia," in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 5.

[43] Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (New York: Philip Allan, 1990), 3.

[44] Thomas Nagel, "What Makes a Political Theory Utopian?," *Social Research* 56, no. 4 (1989): 904.

[45] Laura Valentini, "Ideal Vs. Non-Ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map," *Philosophy Compass* 7, no. 9 (2012): 657.

[46] Joseph H. Carens, *Equality, Moral Incentives, and the Market* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 3.

22

moment; the focus in this chapter is on the utopian form rather than utopian content, as one author puts it.[47]

Having excluded the pejorative sense of the word utopia, it is important that we define the term, for without a definition, utopia becomes untenably broad. If it is simply the good/impossible society, as the word itself suggests, this could include much of fiction, especially science fiction and fantasy, religious or secular notions of paradise, or indeed many political manifestos.[48] Lyman Tower Sargent offers a candidate, where utopia is defined as:

> A non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space. In standard usage utopia is used both as defined here and as an equivalent for eutopia or a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived.[49]

This looks fairly similar to the characteristics of the ideal state as we have derived them from *Republic*, which is hardly surprising as it is a key text in both traditions—two commonly-cited examples of utopias before More's eponymous work are the Garden of Eden and *Republic*.[50] We might, *a la* Wittgenstein, see a family resemblance between these two traditions, just as Kumar suggests we should look for a family resemblance between different utopias.[51] In addition to Sargent's definition, it is worthwhile including a kind of sobriety, a 'wish to walk in step with current realities'.[52] Or, we could follow Donald R. Morrison in distinguishing between a utopia, a description of an imaginary society which is better than any existing one, and a 'mere utopia', an imaginary society which its author recognised as impossible. It might be better than any actual society, but it could never actually exist.[53] This rules out the utopias of instant gratification like the medieval Cockaygne, or the childish daydream where everyone gets ice cream for breakfast and homework is outlawed. While utopianism seeks to create an image of a much better (or, possibly, a perfect) society, it does

---

[47] Gregory Claeys, "News from Somewhere: Enhanced Sociability and the Composite Definition of Utopia and Dystopia," *History* 98, no. 2 (2013): 146.
[48] Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 4.
[49] Sargent, *Utopianism*, 6.
[50] Fernando et al., "Functions of Utopia," 779.
[51] Kumar, *Utopia & Anti-Utopia*, 26.
[52] Kumar, "Aspects of the Western Utopian Tradition," *History of the Human Sciences* 16, no. 1 (2003): 64.
[53] Morrison, "Utopian Character," 232. I have made a similar distinction elsewhere between utopia and "utopia proper": see Herbert, "Identifying Utopia."

so within the constraints of what is actually possible, given human nature as it is, or as it might plausibly be.[54] This looks similar to the constraints we discussed earlier, namely the assumptions about the way people and nature actually are. It is also reminiscent of Rawls's assumptions of strict compliance and favourable conditions. These assumptions play an important role in limiting the range of possible ideal states, or utopias in this case.

The difference between utopianism and ideal state theory is a difference in presentation and narrative style, not a substantial difference in form or criteria. Utopias generally tell stories about everyday life in the ideal society. The transformation of everyday life for the better is characteristic of utopias.[55] Many utopian authors, beginning with Thomas More, use the literary device of a journey, because that device requires the author to give lively descriptions, which allows them to create pleasing images of life in utopia. In this way the author prepares the reader to accept the utopia's institutions.[56] Kumar suggests the important difference is that utopia shows the best society not as a normative or prescriptive model, but as actually achieved, as already in existence. Rather than an abstract ideal, a utopia is shown as a society in full swing, and we are invited to vicariously participate in that society.[57] For Kumar, then, this means that *Republic* is not a utopia. Having said that, he excludes it on the grounds that it is part of the pre-history of utopia; for Kumar utopia proper—what we might call capital-U utopia—was invented by More.[58] Within this context, Kumar does not insist on a strict definition, finding family resemblance sufficient. In that vein, we might describe utopia and the ideal state as occupying different positions on the family tree, but without attempting to be more precise in describing *where* on that family tree they both are. The key point is that where utopia shows the ideal *as it is*, the ideal state describes the ideal *as it should be*. The one is descriptive, a narrative portrayal of a different way of life, the other is more rationalistic; expounding the underlying principles of an ideal society.[59] The ideal state is a rational exercise; utopia appeals to our imagination and emotions as well as our reason. This is by no means a substantial difference, nor should it be treated as a firm demarcation: many, though not all, utopias are ideal state theories as well; the description of utopia can certainly imply a prescription of how things should be. For our purposes the best way of

---

[54] Kumar, "Utopian Tradition," 64.
[55] Sargent, *Utopianism*, 4.
[56] Bertrand de Jouvenal, "Utopias for Practical Purposes," in *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, ed. Frank E. Manuel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 221.
[57] Kumar, *Utopia & Anti-Utopia*, 25.
[58] Kumar, "Utopian Tradition," 68.
[59] Introduction to Frank E. Manuel, ed., *Utopias and Utopian Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), vii.

thinking about utopia is as a (near) sub-set of ideal states. That is, most utopias are ideal states presented in a particular way, the way we have described here. There are, however, some utopias which are descriptions of a better society which are *not* ideal states because they are not prescriptions. Many science fiction utopias might fall into this category, for example some societies in the *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* universes.

An acknowledged feature of utopia which is not usually *explicitly* acknowledged as a feature of ideal state theory is criticism of the status quo.[60] More's *Utopia* set the trend for this, combining a sketch of the ideal state and a critique of contemporary society, and this has remained characteristic of the genre of utopian fiction; this sets it apart from idyll and satire by combining elements of both.[61] Most utopias make a comparison between actual life and life in the utopia, pointing out what is wrong with the way things are and providing a suggestion as to how things could be improved—the implied prescription mentioned above.[62] That is, utopias hold up a 'mirror to the fears and aspirations of the time in which they were written'.[63] This mirror is designed to show an alternative to the way things are; like a funhouse mirror in reverse, it magnifies the good features.[64] This invites us to react to an undesirable present and aspire to improve our lot through imagining possible alternatives.[65] Gregory Claeys holds that 'utopianism entails a process of imagining much better or ideal (but not 'perfect') societies, which serve as models to judge the inadequacies of the present, as well as the actual experiments which result from them'.[66] The standard view of ideal state theory treats the ideal state as a "shining beacon"; an orientation and goal for change. This suggests that criticism of the status quo will be present in accounts of the ideal state as well. Given my thesis that accounts of the ideal state solve local problems even when the author takes themselves to be engaged in a general project, this is worth noting.

Having completed our slightly tangential discussion of utopia, we can return to the ideal state. For our purposes, the word utopia can be understood as referring to more or less the same

---

[60] See, for example, Hans-Herbert Kögler, "Utopianism," in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 939.
[61] Fokkema, *Perfect Worlds*, 31.
[62] Sargent, *Utopianism*, 5.
[63] Barbara Goodwin, ed., *The Philosophy of Utopia* (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 2001), 2.
[64] Sargent, *Utopianism*, 112.
[65] Vieira, "The Concept of Utopia," 7.
[66] Gregory Claeys, *Marx and Marxism* (London: Pelican, 2018), 231.

thing as the ideal state.[67] The next stage of our investigation is to evaluate some features which are often included in discussions about the ideal state, one relatively trivial and two more significant: whether it needs to be a blueprint; whether it is perfect; and whether it is eternal. This is part of our project to carefully examine the assumptions we make about the ideal state, to see whether they are justified.

1.3 Blueprint of the Ideal Society

The ideal state is often described as some sort of blueprint. As we saw, Popper describes it as 'a blueprint of the society at which we aim'.[68] Anthony Kenny talks about Socrates presenting a blueprint for an ideal city;[69] Peter V. Conroy describes Rousseau's *Social Contract* as a blueprint.[70] J.C. Davis criticises the millennium tradition (another type of ideal society) as lacking the utopia's blueprint quality.[71] This association between utopias and blueprints is by no means restricted to politics. Darren Webb argues that what he calls the 'utopian realist' approach to education lacks a blueprint.[72] Characterising utopia, or the ideal society, as some sort of blueprint has been severely criticised as 'almost wholly inaccurate'.[73] There are very few utopias with the level of detail required to be considered a blueprint; often the most generous description would be a sketch. Sargent states, quite simply, that Popper has got it wrong, though this at least partly depends on what Popper means by a blueprint.[74] He makes an analogy with engineering which may clarify his intent: 'few manufacturers would be prepared to proceed to the production of a new engine on the basis of a blueprint alone, even if it were drawn up by the greatest expert, without first making a model and "developing" it by little adjustments as far as possible'.[75] Thus, by blueprint, Popper means a detailed technical diagram which outlines the specifications for the ideal state. Sargent points

---

[67] It is common, especially in older texts, to capitalise utopia, even though referring to a general category of ideal society. However, Utopia is a proper noun, referring to the island invented by More. Throughout this thesis, therefore, I will refer to utopia as a general category with a lowercase u. Utopia, then, is a utopia.

[68] Popper, *The Open Society*, 157.

[69] Kenny, *New History*, 51.

[70] Peter V. Conroy, Jr., "Rousseau's Organic State," *South Atlantic Bulletin* 44, no. 2 (1979): 1.

[71] Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society*, 36.

[72] Darren Webb, "Where's the Vision? The Concept of Utopia in Contemporary Educational Theory," *Oxford Review of Education* 35, no. 6 (2009): 748-49. Utopian realist is a somewhat redundant term; as noted above, utopianism *is* realistic (Kumar's point about sobriety, below, is particularly relevant). The term is probably intended to distinguish this realistic utopianism from the pejorative sense of the word. For our purposes, we can understand the use of "realist utopian" as synonymous with "utopian".

[73] Lyman Tower Sargent, "Authority & Utopia: Utopianism in Political Thought," *Polity* 14, no. 4 (1982): 570.

[74] If Popper has made a mistake in describing utopia as a "blueprint" then surely so have the other authors listed above. However, Sargent is criticising Popper directly in the article in question.

[75] Popper, *The Open Society*, 164.

out that Popper's analysis is empirically false.[76] The history of political thought is not a series of blueprints. Constitutions rarely go beyond the basic structure, and authors seldom expect their work to be put into practise unmodified.[77] George Kateb agrees, arguing that describing the ideal state as a blueprint, containing 'detailed recommendations concerning all facets of life' would make any serious utopian thinker uncomfortable.[78] Instead, Kateb argues, the key motivation for utopia is like that of someone visiting a foreign country: to "get the feel" for the place; to see new and interesting features; to make some somewhat hasty generalisations and occasionally condescending judgements. That is, the aim of an author is to say what the tone of life is like in utopia.[79] This project is harmed by talking about blueprints, for the word has a strong association with *dystopia*.[80] While More's *Utopia* provided images of an alternative to reality, these images were not blueprints to be imposed directly onto More's world; they were an imaginative beginning to solutions, not a solution in themselves.[81] We can see now why the word blueprint is 'flatly rejected' by most utopian thinkers.[82] Where a blueprint contains detailed prescriptions and descriptions of every facet of whatever it is a blueprint of, most utopias simply do not provide that level of detail; rather, they provide a sketch of what the finalised society might look like. While it is at least logically possible that an account of the ideal state could be sufficiently detailed to be considered a blueprint, that is not the project in which ideal state theorists are engaged.[83] Had Popper used "sketch" in place of "blueprint" he would have avoided this criticism altogether.

This raises a further question, perhaps, about how much detail is required, or in what areas detail is required (what family life or private property and so on will be like), in order to qualify as an account of the ideal state. We would be right to dismiss an account which is identical to an existing political structure except for one aspect—say, the United States

---

[76] This might seem unkind to Popper, who is after all only using a very common idiom. But it is important to note that describing utopia or the ideal state as some sort of blueprint is by no means unique to Popper, and it is important to be accurate in the way we describe the project of defining the ideal state.

[77] Sargent, "Authority & Utopia," 570.

[78] George Kateb, "Utopia and the Good Life," in *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, ed. Frank E. Manuel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 239.

[79] Ibid., 240.

[80] David Halpin, "Utopian Totalism Versus Utopian Realism: A Reply to Darren Webb," *Oxford Review of Education* 35, no. 6 (2009): 762.

[81] Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (New York and London: Methuen, 1986), 3.

[82] Sargent, *Utopianism*, 107.

[83] If we wanted to create a blueprint for New Zealand, for example, we would need to start with all our statutes, legal decisions, and political conventions, not to mention social mores and customs. Such a project would be unfathomably complex, and totally unreadable.

exactly as it is but with universal free healthcare—as failing to provide an account of the ideal state. Going too much farther into this question will likely result in a sorites paradox: exactly what number of institutions need to be idealised in order to count as an ideal state? Therefore, we should leave this requirement as unrestrictive as possible, remembering Kumar's point that it is by use and context that we shall recognise the ideal state.[84] As we will see in subsequent chapters, ideal states have been described in considerable detail by some authors, and in only very broad terms by others. Plato, for example, tells us virtually nothing about his productive class; his focus is on the military and ruling class of the city.

1.4 State of Perfection

We noted earlier that the word "ideal" carries connotations of perfection. This raises the question of whether we should expect any given ideal state to be perfect, and if so, in what way or ways we should expect it to be perfect. Walter Goedecke describes Aristotle's approach in the *Politics* as beginning 'his discussion of political structures and changes with the statement that utopia, the good community, *the perfect state*, is the goal of politics'.[85] Isaiah Berlin notes that

> The idea of a perfect society is a very old dream, whether because of the ills of the present, which lead men to conceive of what their world would be like without them – to imagine some ideal state in which there was no misery and no greed, no danger or poverty or fear or brutalising labour or insecurity – or because these Utopias are fictions deliberately constructed as satires, intended to criticise the actual world and to shame those who control existing regimes, or those who suffer them too tamely; or perhaps they are social fantasies – simple exercises of the poetical imagination.[86]

Berlin is suggesting three possibilities: the ideal state/utopia (for Berlin, they are synonymous) can be a) an expression of how much better life could be, b) a satire intended to embarrass the powers-that-be into some action (Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, though not an ideal state, is a good example of this type), or c) a simple imaginative exercise; many science fiction and fantasy novels, for instance, fall into this category. Only the first of these categories is really relevant to our project; the key point is that Berlin is talking about the

---

[84] Kumar, *Utopia & Anti-Utopia*, 26.

[85] Walter Robert Goedecke, "Aristotle's Search for the Perfect State: The Methodology of the Politics," *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 1, no. 1/2 (1970): 58. My emphasis. Though Goedecke mentions utopia here, Aristotle can hardly be called a utopian theorist.

[86] Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, Second ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 21.

dream of a *perfect* society. There does seem to be a view that the ideal state is somehow perfect.

On the other hand, there is an argument that the ideal state will not be perfect. Robert Nozick argues that while utopia is the best of all possible worlds, but the world which is the best possible for me will not be that for you. He concludes that utopia must be the best of all possible worlds for all of us.[87] Nozick's point is that we have to abstract from individual interests to some sort of common good; to find the possible world which is the best for all of us collectively rather than the best for each of us individually. But, in thinking about what that best of all possible worlds might be, we need to put some limits on the range of possible worlds under consideration. We cannot think Nozick is talking about the range of *logically* possible worlds, for that would include worlds which do not have to deal with the problem of scarcity, like the medieval Cockaygne. Nozick makes this point, too, saying that utopia 'must be, *in some restricted sense*, the best for all of us'.[88] We can find that restricted sense by requiring our possible worlds to make the kinds of realistic assumptions we discussed earlier; we are looking for the best of all *realistically* possible worlds. Claeys argues that utopias are not only imagined good places, but could actually be created in reality,[89] and, above, we referred to Kumar's argument that utopias have a kind of sobriety, a 'wish to walk in step with current realities'.[90] *Current* realities is an important caveat; an account of the ideal state, or a vision of utopia, will be limited by currently available technology, as well as by available human and natural resources more generally. The way to get word around in Plato's Athens, for example, was to gather a few thousand men at the Pnyx hill; in the ideal city word of mouth is still the best method to distribute information. So we can describe the range of possible worlds as *possibly realisable*, rather than as *logically possible*. If Nozick is right, this characterisation of the ideal state as the best of all possibly realisable worlds surely makes perfection nigh impossible to reach. There are two reasons for this, moral pluralism and the problem of scarcity.

Moral pluralism is the idea that while there might be some objective moral truths, there are issues about which two people can hold different views without either of them having made a

---

[87] Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Basic Books, 1974), 298.
[88] Ibid. My emphasis.
[89] Claeys, "News from Somewhere," 148.
[90] Kumar, "Utopian Tradition," 64.

mistake in reasoning.[91] Politics and political views are similarly pluralistic: individuals occupying different points on the political spectrum can hold opposing views but, all things being equal, neither has made an error in forming those views. Pluralism and perfection seem incompatible, given that we are looking for the best possible world for all of us.[92] Because there is no single right answer to what qualifies as the best state, it is difficult to imagine that any ideal state can be perfect and pluralist at the same time.[93]

The second objection to calling the ideal state perfect is the problem of scarcity. Davis identifies two types of scarcity, which he calls material and sociological scarcity.[94] Material scarcity refers to a scarcity of resources: there are only so many beautiful people, only so much fertile land, and so on. Sociological scarcity is the acknowledgement that there are only a limited number of seats on a council or committee, a limited number of positions of honour or prestige, only one king or centre of power, and so on. If the ideal state happens to be a monarchy, then for many ambitious people, the best of all possible worlds would naturally be the one in which *they* are the monarch; these worlds are all obviously incompatible. Even a pure democracy, like ancient Athens—which we discuss in Chapter 3—encounters this kind of sociological scarcity. Though, at least in theory, everyone is able to participate in governance, there will still be a limited number of popular leaders.[95] The upshot is that there seems to be an argument that the ideal state does describe a perfect society, and another argument that it does not—with no clear reason why we should prefer one argument over the other. To try and decide which we should prefer, let us consider some possible ways in which an ideal state might be considered perfect. We will compare each possibility with *Republic*, our paradigm example. If we cannot find that kind of perfection in it, we will conclude that perfection does not need to be a general trait of accounts of the ideal state.

---

[91] Gregory S Kavka, "Why Even Morally Perfect People Would Need Government," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 12, no. 1 (1995): 4.

[92] Though we might be able to construct a "perfectly pluralist" account of society, a society of toleration *par excellence*, this seems to assume that pluralism is itself perfect. To a religious zealot, for instance, religious toleration is very imperfect indeed.

[93] This is not to say that a particular ideal state must be pluralist. Plato's *Republic* is most definitely not pluralist; there is one idea of the Good which guides the society. The key point is that perfection and pluralism seem to be incompatible; if I declare a particular ideal state is perfect (for whatever reasons) and you declare it is *imperfect* (for whatever reasons), then assuming neither of us have made an error the ideal state is both perfect and imperfect. But that is not enough to say it is then not *ideal*.

[94] Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society*, 19.

[95] This difficulty calls to mind Margaret Atwood's line that 'better never means better for everyone . . . it always means worse, for some', though Marx, for instance, would likely disagree: the progression of society towards communism is a series of improvements for the whole community. Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Vintage, 1996), 218.

A perfect state might be a society of perfect individuals, a society in which each individual is completely virtuous. This is the situation we encountered earlier, when we noted that the easiest way to make the ideal state good would be to populate it with morally perfect individuals. We concluded then that the ideal state needs to reflect human nature as it is, so Plato's city is not populated by perfect citizens. Because of this, Raphael Demos thought he had found a paradox in *Republic*: '*The ideal state*, as Plato describes it, *is composed of un-ideal individuals. . . .* How can one legitimately call a community perfect when so many of its members are imperfect'?[96] For Plato, morally perfect individuals (or morally ideal individuals) are philosophers, as only philosophers can really understand the Good, which R.S. Bluck points out is as important for personal virtue as it is for running a state.[97] Bluck concludes that Plato's ideal state is not ideal in the sense of perfect.[98] That is, his ideal state is not a society populated entirely by perfect individuals.

Claeys is a vocal opponent of describing utopia, the ideal state, as perfect. He argues that utopia is not a branch of theology; in particular, it is not an account of a perfect society, which is necessarily unattainable.[99] As we have seen, he has elsewhere described utopianism as the process of imagining 'much better or ideal (but not "perfect") societies'.[100] He points out that the society in More's *Utopia* contains crime, imperialism, 'and a host of other evils'.[101] Sargent, also, notes that More's low estimate of humanity induces him to prescribe strict laws with harsh punishments, such as slavery for leaving town without permission.[102] It looks like we cannot think of the ideal state as a society of morally perfect individuals, which seems to be what Claeys and Sargent have in mind when they use, and reject, the term.[103] Though education and habituation can improve humanity, it seems that Claeys and Sargent do not think that it will be possible to reach perfection this way.

---

[96] Raphael Demos, "Paradoxes in Plato's Doctrine of the Ideal State," *The Classical Quarterly* 7, no. 3/4 (1957): 164. Demos's emphasis.
[97] R.S. Bluck, "Plato's 'Ideal' State," *The Classical Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (1959): 167.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Claeys, "News from Somewhere," 148.
[100] Claeys, *Marx and Marxism*, 231.
[101] Claeys, "News from Somewhere," 149.
[102] Lyman Tower Sargent, "Five Hundred Years of Thomas More's Utopia and Utopianism," *Utopian Studies* 27, no. 2, SPECIAL ISSUE: On the Commemoration of the Five Hundredth Anniversary of Thomas More's Utopia (2016): 190. We will talk more about slavery in Utopia in the next chapter.
[103] The institution of slavery in Utopia seems to be a response to the imperfect nature of humans.

Another possibility is that the ideal state is perfectly constituted. That is, the arrangement of institutions in the ideal state is a perfect arrangement. The immediate question is what precisely that means. We might posit a Platonic Form of the State or, for Plato, the Form of the *polis*; it would have all the relevant properties of Forms, including perfection.[104] However, scholars seem fairly united in the position that there is no such Form.[105] Given that we cannot appeal to a Form of the State, I suggest that for any given institutional arrangement to be considered perfect, there cannot be any better arrangement, and, further, the arrangement in question must be without flaw. Let us see whether *Republic* meets these criteria.

Whether there is any possible better institutional arrangement than the one Plato describes depends at least in part on what we think the purpose of the state is. If, for example, I say the purpose of the state is to ensure collective flourishing, and you say the purpose of the state is to ensure mutual protection, it follows that you and I are going to rate various different institutional arrangements differently. In this case it is the author's opinion which matters; we need to know what Plato thinks. Unfortunately, Plato never addresses this question directly, leading to disagreement among scholars as to just what he thinks the purpose of the state is. David Keyt suggests we might get some clues from *Euthydemus* 294b-c, a passage which lists the functions of statesmanship. Keyt summarises: 'the function of a statesman is to promote the wealth, freedom, domestic tranquillity, wisdom, and happiness of the citizens of his city, and to save them from poverty, slavery, faction (*stasis*), folly, and wretchedness'.[106] At the beginning of the project to create the ideal city, Socrates claims that 'none of us is self-sufficient, but we all need many things' (II.369b), and as a result 'many people gather in a single place to live together as partners and helpers' (II.369c). Keyt concludes that, for Plato, the purpose of the state is to provide the five goods specified above, and avoid the five evils. As evidence for this he points out that the ideal city in *Republic* meets exactly these requirements.[107] If Keyt is right, then this is one way we might think of the ideal state as being perfect.

---

[104] Plato calls the Forms 'what is completely' (*Republic* V.477a). In *Republic*, Plato's ideal city exemplifies four virtues: courage, justice, wisdom, and moderation (IV.427e). These are, incidentally, four of the seven "Cardinal Virtues"; the other three are the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, described in the Bible (1 Corinthians 13 [KJV]).

[105] For instance, M.F. Burnyeat, "Utopia and Fantasy: The Practicability of Plato's Ideally Just City," in *Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 298.

[106] David Keyt, "Plato on Justice," in *A Companion to Plato*, ed. Hugh H. Benson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 345.

[107] Ibid.

However, the ideal city in *Republic* is not the only arrangement which is able to fulfil Plato's requirements for the good state. Socrates' first attempt at creating an ideal city results in a small, mutually-beneficial and mutually-reliant, close-knit community, which Glaucon derides as fit only for pigs (II.372d). This city—which Catherine McKeen delightfully names Swillsburg, though it is more usually called the city of pigs—is a highly cooperative society operating under conditions of enlightened self-interest.[108] Debra Nails describes it as a form of communism which is a truly ideal *polis*, and points out that the Athenian visitor, in *Laws*, calls it the best polity.[109] This is somewhat difficult to understand, as the city is not communistic as far as I can see. While there is a strong theme of cooperation and community, property does not seem to be shared; Socrates describes buying and selling (II.371c-d). This means it does not match up with the description of the best polity in *Laws*. There, the character of the Athenian says that we will find the 'ideal society and state, and the best code of laws, where the old saying "friends' property is genuinely shared" is put into practice as widely as possible throughout the entire state' (*Laws* V.739c). This does not look like Swillsburg. However, the view that the city of pigs is the truly best city has been defended; it is described as 'the *Republic's* ultimate utopia'.[110] The later, more detailed, ideal city ranks second, though it is better than any city actually in existence. Later, Socrates asks what conditions are needed for the ideal city to be possible (V.472e); we could ask the same question about the city of pigs. Morrison's answer is that it is possible 'if all the inhabitants are like Socrates'—that is, if all the inhabitants are as moderate or temperate in their desires as Socrates is.[111] Glaucon, evidently, is not like Socrates, for he rejects this version of the ideal city. Whether Plato thought the city of pigs the truly ideal state or not, it is abandoned. If we agree that the city of pigs is the ultimate utopia in *Republic*, then it seems that there is a possible better arrangement than that proposed by the ideal city: either the city of pigs, or the ideal polity mentioned in *Laws*.

The other criterion we have given here for an institutional arrangement to be considered perfect is that it must be without flaw. We, descendants of a long democratic and egalitarian tradition, would almost certainly find many flaws in Plato's ideal city: Kenny describes it as

---

[108] Catherine McKeen, "Swillsburg City Limits (the 'City of Pigs': *Republic* 370c-372d)," *Polis: The Journal for Ancient Greek Political Thought* 21, no. 1-2 (2004): 71.
[109] Debra Nails, "Plato's *Republic* in Its Athenian Context," *History of Political Thought* 33, no. 1 (2012): 8.
[110] Morrison, "Utopian Character," 252.
[111] Ibid., 252-53.

'in many respects in conflict with the most basic human rights, devoid of privacy and full of deceit'.[112] Both the criteria just proposed are satisfied here: we have found a flaw in the ideal state, and can see a better alternative; namely, one which has a greater respect for human rights. But, we are more than two millennia removed from Plato; given our project it would be more appropriate to ask whether a fifth-century Athenian would find any flaw in Plato's ideal city.[113] Setting aside the anti-democratic nature of the city, which many Athenians would likely find deeply problematic, it seems that there is a flaw: there are women in the ruling class. We will explore gender equality in the ideal city in a little more depth in Chapter 3. Here we will note only that the ruling class is open to both women and men, so long as they meet the relevant criteria. Plato argues that 'men and women are by nature the same with respect to guarding the city' (V.456a).[114] Notwithstanding these arguments, the presence of women in the ruling class is likely to be considered a flaw by contemporaries. Indeed, Plato himself could oppose including women in the ruling class. Elsewhere in *Republic*, perhaps speaking out of habit, he reveals a low estimate of female intelligence, for example.[115] In *Timaeus*, Plato tells us that a man who has failed to live a good life will be reincarnated as a woman; if he—or, more accurately, she—still fails to reform, she will be reincarnated as an animal (*Timaeus* 42b-c). In *Laws*, he says that 'a woman's natural potential for virtue is inferior to a man's' (*Laws* VI.781b). Aristotle shares Plato's attitude; he argues that 'the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior, and the one rules, and the other is ruled'.[116] In non-philosophical circles, Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* (*Assemblywomen*) is a comedy premised on women gaining political power, leading to economic and sexual communism.[117] That is, the possibility of women having political power is played for laughs. But this is not the only flaw to be found in *Republic*. Plato himself identifies one: the ideal regime will eventually collapse. We will consider this in more detail when we look at whether the ideal state is eternal (unsurprisingly we will conclude that it is not), but for the moment we can note that Plato thinks the ideal regime he proposes will eventually collapse due to human

---

[112] Kenny, *New History*, 52.

[113] Remembering that Sargent characterises eutopia (the good society) as one which its author intended a '*contemporaneous reader* to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived'. Sargent, *Utopianism*, 6. My emphasis.

[114] From the ranks of the guards, or auxiliaries, the city's rulers are chosen.

[115] Gregory Vlastos, "Was Plato a Feminist?," in *Studies in Greek Philosophy*, ed. Gregory Vlastos, vol. II: Socrates, Plato, and Their Tradition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 136-37.

[116] Aristotle, "Politics," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1254b13-14.

[117] Aristophanes, *Birds, Lysistrata, Assembly-Women, Wealth*, trans. Stephen Halliwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 147.

error. The details will be clearer once we have explored Plato's ideal city in more depth in Chapter 3, but in a nutshell Plato prescribes a strict class structure for his ideal city, which is to be maintained by the rulers. He thinks it is inevitable that people will occasionally end up in the wrong class, in a position for which they are not suited. Over time, this mistake will lead to more mistakes being made, until eventually the city's regime can no longer be identified with the ideal. Once again, it looks like there is a case for saying that the ideal state is perfect—understood here as perfectly constituted—and a case for saying that it might get close, but will ultimately fall short of the standard of perfection.

One final possibility is that the ideal state is perfectly just. This is similar to the perfectly constituted idea: there is no flaw in the state's justice. In other words, there is no injustice in the ideal state. For Plato, there are two kinds of justice, ordinary (or vulgar) justice,[118] and Platonic justice.[119] In the terms of the letters analogy we saw Socrates make at the beginning of this chapter, Platonic justice is the small letters—justice in the individual soul—which describes the arrangement of the three parts of the soul in their natural order, ruled by reason.[120] Ordinary justice—the big letters—is the arrangement of the ideal city, characterised by 'doing one's own work and not meddling with what isn't one's own' (IV.433a-b). It seems that there will be no (ordinary) injustice in the ideal city, as maintaining the stability and balance of the city's system is among the rulers' first concerns, who are able to act in accordance with the Form of Justice. Since we also assume strict compliance and favourable conditions, we are justified in concluding that Plato's ideal city is indeed perfectly just.

It is not clear just how we are to understand the ideal state as perfect. It might be that a perfect state is a society of perfectly virtuous individuals, as it seems that at least some commentators think, but this is implausible. The state might be perfect in that there is no possible better arrangement; or that it is without flaw; or that it is perfectly just. Only the last of these options has been without major objection, at least in Plato's case. However, Plato himself might balk at describing the city as perfect because only the Forms can be perfect.[121]

---

[118] Robert William Hall, "The Just and Happy Man of the *Republic*: Fact or Fallacy?," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9, no. 2 (1971): 147.

[119] Jonathan Barnes, "Justice Writ Large," in *Virtue and Happiness: Essays in Honour of Julia Annas*, ed. Rachana Kamtekar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 40.

[120] Hall, "Just and Happy Man," 148.

[121] At *Republic* X.597a, for example, the Forms are described as 'completely that which is'.

Just as with the description of an ideal state as a kind of blueprint, perfection does not seem to be the project. Sargent argues that equating the ideal state (or utopia) with perfection is a very common error; utopianism 'has nothing to do with perfect or perfection, never has and never will'.[122] Above, we saw that Claeys and Sargent argue that More's Utopian society is not perfect, for there is still crime in Utopia. The defining feature of this kind of project is not a search for ethical perfection, but rather a 'vivid exercise of ethical imagination'.[123] Therefore, we will say that an account of the ideal state is a description of the best possible political arrangement, rather than a perfect arrangement. Ideal state theorists are trying to describe the best possible state given certain constraints, the most obvious of which are their assumptions about nature and humanity.

To understand the difference between "perfect" and "best possible", we can make an analogy with mathematical or logical functions. A function will often have a global maximum—an absolute highest point. There will also be local maxima: the highest point within a particular range, but not necessarily the highest point of the whole function. A mountain range is a good illustration of local and global maxima. Aoraki / Mount Cook is the highest mountain in New Zealand (3754m),[124] so it is the global maximum, for New Zealand, in terms of elevation. Mount Ruapehu, on the Central Plateau of New Zealand's North Island, is the highest mountain in the area, at 2797m.[125] Thus, Ruapehu is a local maximum: it is taller than any other mountain in the North Island, but still lower than the global maximum. In terms of the ideal state, a perfect state is the global maximum. Most ideal states, then, are not quite perfect but are the *best possible* arrangement: a local maximum. The ideal state is better than any existing state, at least in its author's mind, but it does not claim to be better than any possible state—it does not claim to be perfect.

1.5 The Eternal State

There are really two possible features to consider here: whether the ideal state is everlasting, and whether it is unchanging, or timeless. These features look *prima facie* temptingly

---

[122] Sargent, "Five Hundred Years," 189.

[123] Laurence Davis, "Isaiah Berlin, William Morris, and the Politics of Utopia," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 3, no. 2-3 (2000): 74.

[124] The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. "Mount Cook," 2011, accessed May 2020, https://www.britannica.com/place/Mount-Cook.

[125] The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. "Mount Ruapehu," 2018, accessed May 2020, https://www.britannica.com/place/Mount-Ruapehu.

plausible. Once we reach the ideal—assuming the ideal is actually reachable—it seems intuitively reasonable to assume that we will remain in that ideal state for all time. The ideal state is the best possible political arrangement, and an arrangement which endures seems to be better than one which does not. Further, if the ideal state does endure, we would think that it should not change. For if such-and-such is *the* ideal state—it is *the* best possible arrangement—then any deviation from that arrangement, however small, would mean it is no longer the ideal state.

This view, or something like it, can be found in the literature. Once again we can turn to Popper, who describes Plato's project as an attempt to 'stop further corruption in the political field by *arresting all political change*'.[126] According to Popper, then, Plato's state is free from the evils which plague other states because it does not change, and hence does not degenerate. As we will see, Popper's analysis is mistaken. Berlin, also, describes the ideal state as static; it does not change, he argues, because it has achieved perfection.[127] More recently, Kumar has suggested that the classical conception of utopia was static and fixed. Once the ideal state had been established, it was assumed to last forever.[128] Plato does not indicate how long he expects the ideal city in *Republic* to last, but Klosko notes that he comments in *Laws* that Magnesia, like Egypt, should remain unchanged for thousands of years (*Laws* II.657a-b).[129] More says that, in building their state as they have, the Utopians 'have laid the foundations of a commonwealth that is not only very happy but also, so far as human prescience can tell, likely to last forever' (U: 112). Timelessness, then, is a characteristic feature of many accounts of the ideal state.[130] The mistake which Berlin, Popper, and Kumar make is to confuse timelessness with everlastingness. The ideal state is often presented like a photograph, a snapshot in time without past or future; it just *is*.[131] It is easy to mistake this timelessness for everlastingness.

An ideal state may allow for a certain, trivial, level of change. In a monarchy, for instance, a king will die and be replaced by his successor. The number of advisors or ministers might change as a greater or lesser number of candidates is available, and so on. That is not the sort

---

[126] Popper, *The Open Society*, 21. Popper's emphasis.
[127] Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 21.
[128] Kumar, "Utopian Tradition," 66.
[129] George Klosko, *Jacobins and Utopians: The Political Theory of Fundamental Moral Reform* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 89.
[130] Ibid., 90.
[131] Sargent, "Five Hundred Years," 186-87.

of change with which we are concerned. It is substantial change in the institutions of the ideal state which is our focus. As we have seen, there is reason to believe that early ideal state theories are unchanging. From the Enlightenment, theorists began to ground the ideal state in history; it became a future state towards which we gradually approximate through time.[132] Marx and Engels' ideal state is perhaps of this kind, a teleological development towards the best possible society. Once that final stage has been reached, the questions about change and everlastingness still apply. Let us see if the ideal state in *Republic* achieves either goal.

Plato's ideal city will not be eternal. Though the ideal state is an aristocracy,[133] 'rightly said to be good and just' (VIII.544e), it will eventually decay into an inferior regime: a timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, or tyranny. While it has been suggested that this sequence is in order of merit relative to the ideal, not in order of change,[134] Plato does seem to think that a state will degrade in this order. For instance, Socrates comments that tyranny, the final stage of the city's collapse, 'evolves from democracy' (VIII.562a). That the city will, eventually, move away from the ideal programme is inevitable, for 'everything that comes into being must decay. Not even a constitution such as this will last forever. It, too, must face dissolution' (VIII.546a). This seems to express a general principle of Greek thought: kinds of things are eternal; individual things are not.[135] The dissolution, Plato tells us, will come from a natural human tendency to make mistakes. We need not go into the substance of those mistakes here, save to note that they will, eventually, cause the city to turn away from the ideal programme. Rousseau, in the *Social Contract*, makes much the same point, arguing that 'the body politic, as much as the human body, begins to die from its birth on, and bears within itself the causes of its destruction' (III.11). The best constituted state 'will come to an end, but later than others, if no unforeseen accident brings it to destruction before its time' (III.11). This indicates that the ideal state need not last forever; we can still consider it as an ideal state even though it will, sooner or later, crumble.

---

[132] Klosko, *Jacobins and Utopians*, 90.

[133] Note that 'aristocracy' here is the rule of the 'aristos'—the best—rather than rule by a noble class. It might be better described as a meritocracy.

[134] Rex Martin, "The Ideal State in Plato's *Republic*," *History of Political Thought* 2, no. 1 (1981): 20.

[135] A principle which is probably most clearly expressed in Plato's thought at *Timaeus* 49d-e.

1.6 A New Formulation of Ideal State Theory

The general description of the ideal state as an account of the best possible political organisation, which I have called the shining beacon on the hill, is a good general description. However, it does not tell the whole story. Taken as it is, the shining beacon formulation implies that the ideal state is a general solution that might apply locally, so that if we want our existing political societies to be as good as they possibly can be, we just have to choose a model of the ideal state which agrees, or is close to, our assumptions about human nature and use it as a guide. Plato makes this assumption: he takes for granted that 'at whatever time the muse of philosophy controls a city, the constitution we've described will also exist at that time, whether it is past, present, or future' (VI.499d). We do not believe in Forms any more, so we are not inclined to advocate for philosophers being part of our various governments. But even if we did accept that there were philosophers who could know the Good itself, it is unlikely that we would be willing to hand all executive power over to them; ideas of political participation have changed somewhat since Plato's day. These considerations might incline us to think that Plato's ideal state is obsolete, and of limited interest except to historians. This shining beacon view also makes an assumption which is common in ideal state theory: that this is a somehow scientific or quasi-scientific process. In positing the ideal state, an author can describe a shining beacon which reflects the *true* nature of political relations, based upon laws of human nature. The foundation of human nature supports a general solution to the problem of how society ought to be organised. This is what many ideal state theorists seem to think of themselves as doing. In this final section I use the distinction between a theory and a model from the philosophy of science to help us distinguish between the shining beacon conception of the ideal state and the local problem conception that I defend in this thesis.

There are three main kinds of models in science: scale models; analogical models; and mathematical models.[136] Above, we saw that Popper suggested few engineers would build a new engine on the basis of a blueprint alone without first making a model—in this case, "model" means a scale model.[137] Before building a bridge, for example, we might first construct a scale model to illustrate how it is to be put together and how it might react to weight and other pressures. An analogical model is one which represents its target system by

---

[136] Demetris Portides, "Models," in *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Science*, ed. Martin Curd and Stathis Psillos (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 429.

[137] Popper, *The Open Society*, 164.

means of an analogy, for instance the billiard-ball model of a gas. A mathematical model represents its target system by means of mathematical equations, as for example in the ideal gas law. For our purposes the most useful sort of model is a scale model.

Generally, a scientific model is a description of a phenomenon, interpreted in such a way that facilitates access to that phenomenon, or makes understanding it easier.[138] In order to facilitate that access, a model will often focus on specific aspects of a phenomenon, sometimes deliberately disregarding others, suppressing or ignoring what is not relevant to the problem at hand. Thus, a model tends to be only a partial description of the phenomenon in question.[139] For example, a Newtonian model of the solar system ignores things like friction, small bodies such as comets, moons, and asteroids, and so on.[140] Further, models represent phenomena or physical systems in abstract and idealised ways. For example, a model of a building is not an exact replica; it is an idealised and abstract representation of an actual building: while it represents some features of the actual system (the way the building looks), it ignores others (the plumbing system, for instance).[141] One reason for this abstraction is that the world is just too complex; there are too many variables to account for. If we set at least some of them aside, we can highlight and focus on the relationships or structures we are testing or seeking to understand. It is worth noting, additionally, that—particularly with scale models—a number of different models can be made, to examine different features. The model of Auckland's Sky Tower which engineers use to test earthquake resistance, for instance, will be very different to the model which is produced to appeal to potential investors. Where the former model would attempt to replicate as closely as possible the relevant structural elements of the building, ignoring the irrelevant cosmetic elements, the latter model would have exactly the inverse priorities. It is worth remembering that a scale model is not necessarily physical. The word certainly conjures images of physical models, perhaps most commonly encountered among non-engineers in museums, but a computer-generated image or computer-based test is just as much a scale model as a hand-built version.

---

[138] Daniela M. Bailer-Jones, *Scientific Models in Philosophy of Science* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 1.
[139] Ibid., 2.
[140] Alex Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Science: A Contemporary Introduction*, Second ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 99.
[141] Portides, "Models," 429.

The link between models and theories is not clearly defined. Indeed, some argue that it is impossible to draw a clear line between the two.[142] One suggestion is that theory goes beyond explaining particular phenomena, seeking to explain the explanations.[143] Where a model describes an empirical phenomenon, a theory explains the models.[144] What does seem to be more clearly understood is that a theory will be more general than models. That is, a theory is made up of abstract principles, and expected to be universally applicable, while models apply locally—they are often a local application of a theory—and can adjust theory elements to the situation at hand being modelled.[145] As an (admittedly non-scientific) example, we might consider a theory of bridge-building with a model of a particular bridge. The theory will tell us that the bridge needs to be supported in some way and that those supports need to be strong enough to withstand—for instance—the movement of the water in the river across which the bridge is built. The model of a bridge intended to cross a particular river will tell us exactly how strong the supports need to be, how high they need to be, where the best place is to put the bridge, and so on.[146] It is not my intent to get involved in a debate in the philosophy of science; the distinction between a theory and a model seems to be useful, though we might not be able to say much about what the exact nature of that distinction is.

The shining beacon formulation of ideal state theory is analogous to a scientific theory as outlined in the preceding paragraph; a particular account of the ideal state is a scale model of a political organisation. The theory tells us that the ideal state must be based on some assumptions about the way people and nature actually are, but it is the model which generates those assumptions. The theory also tells us that some variables, like noncompliance, can be ignored, analogous to ignoring friction in models of classical motion. The ideal city described in Plato's *Republic* is an excellent illustration. Plato makes certain assumptions about the way people and nature actually are—as we discussed earlier. It is on the basis of these assumptions that his ideal city takes the form it does. Further, this understanding of ideal state theory makes clear why a model of the ideal state does not need to be a blueprint: just as a

---

[142] Roman Frigg and Stephan Hartmann, "Models in Science," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2018).

[143] Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Science*, 70.

[144] It may also indicate what we can ignore when constructing our models. Classical theories of motion, for instance, say that we can ignore the effects of friction when solving a particular problem—when constructing a model of a particular situation.

[145] Bailer-Jones, *Scientific Models*, 4.

[146] Further local application might suggest the best materials, as well. If a bridge is to be built in a particularly remote location for example, materials which are closer at hand might be preferred to those which would need to be transported a long way.

model of a bridge will be simplified in order to make it possible to test, so too a model of the ideal state will be abstracted and idealised in order to make it possible to examine its most important features. This clarifies why we are tempted to think of the ideal state as eternal; a model just *is*, as we discussed earlier. This also resolves our difficulty, from the Introduction, about the difference between a universal or perennial political problem (such as keeping the peace), and a particular solution to a local problem (such as how Hobbes proposes to keep the peace in *Leviathan*). Our theory might give some indication of how to solve the universal problem, and the model applies that theory to a particular context.

The theory-model distinction allows us to see how important local features of the author's world are in influencing the structure of their ideal state. We have to bear in mind that theorists live within a particular political context. Their work, therefore, is bound to be affected by cultural norms and values, as well as the intellectual milieu within which they are working. Like all members of a political society, thinkers are affected by the concerns and events which shape and disrupt the world in which they live.[147] We cannot conceive of the ideal state theorist as a somehow aloof observer of the political world, in the world but not of it. Indeed, an account of the ideal state 'will, if closely examined, prove to be based on the political ideals of its time, and will usually be aimed at certain specific evils to which the conditions then prevailing gave rise'.[148] The shining beacon theory divorces the ideal state from its historical context. It ignores the ways in which a particular model of the ideal state responds to that context. Thinking of an account of the ideal state as a model helps us to understand why some details have been ignored, why theorists working at a similar time might have radically different ideas about what the ideal state is—two engineers, each designing a bridge over the same river, would be most unlikely to produce the same design—and it helps us to recognise that, while theorists may claim to be doing something scientific, their models of the ideal are not so straightforward.

Ideal state theorists do tend to think of their work as providing a shining beacon, as we have seen with Plato; the ideal state is a distant goal which provides a general solution to the problem of social organisation. I am not implying that a model of the ideal state which is presented as a shining beacon somehow does not count as an ideal state. Rather I argue that a

---

[147] Chris Sparks and Stuart Isaacs, *Political Theorists in Context* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.
[148] Lawrence C. Wanlass, ed., *Gettell's History of Political Thought*, Second ed. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953), 4.

model of the ideal state is usefully understood as a particular solution to local problems; that is, some problem local to the time and place in which it was written—it is a local solution that might also apply generally. The ideal state will, in some way, solve that local problem. Thus, it is useful to understand how Plato's *Republic* solves some problem in late-fifth-century-BC Athens; how Hobbes's *Leviathan* solves problems in seventeenth-century England, and so on. By comparing key features of the ideal state with the thinker's historical context, and considering other evidence, it will be possible to identify the problem which the ideal state is intended to solve. It should be noted that this reaction is by no means a conscious part of the process; as mentioned ideal state theorists do think they are providing a shining beacon.

A word of caution, before we get much further. I argue that ideal states are usefully understood as a reaction and response to historical context, but I do not argue that they can *only* be so understood. *Republic* is, for very good reason, a highly influential and popular text. It is very unlikely that a given Platonic dialogue will turn out to have only *one* theme.[149] I argue that an account of the ideal state can be understood as a particular solution to local problems, but it can be understood without this interpretative frame. We can broadly understand how Plato's ideal state works, draw some lessons from it, and make criticisms of it without needing to understand how it constitutes a response to the political reality of Plato's time—as, indeed, we have done in this chapter. In the Introduction I noted that the extreme contextualist position is a stronger position than I take in this thesis. However, I argue that understanding *Republic*—or any ideal state—in relation to the time in which it was written gives a more nuanced and more interesting understanding of the ideal state and what it is aiming to achieve. Glenn Burgess notes that it would be an unnecessary constraint, as well as untrue, to assume that any complex work could fit into only one context.[150] Burgess warns us to take care with interpreting, for otherwise 'we might pin down a book in the way that a butterfly collector pins down his specimens: by first ensuring that it is dead'.[151] Accordingly, my argument should not be read as a deflationary critique of ideal state theory, more as a contextual critique—to coin a phrase.

---

[149] George Klosko, "Implementing the Ideal State," *The Journal of Politics* 43, no. 2 (1981): 367.
[150] Burgess, "Contexts," 675.
[151] Ibid.

1.7 Conclusion

The word "ideal" in ideal state is ambiguous, which makes describing the ideal state in general terms challenging. From Plato's *Republic* we have derived a good general definition of an account of the ideal state as a description of the best possible political organisation. "Best possible" has to be understood within some broad caveats, such as realistic assumptions about people and nature—as Rousseau puts it, 'taking men as they are and laws as they can be'. This is what I call the shining beacon on the hill, which is the standard way of thinking about the ideal state. Importing the concepts of theory and model from the philosophy of science has helped us to clarify the distinction between the shining beacon and local problem conceptions of ideal state theory. The shining beacon conception is a general theory of the ideal state and, as such, is not able to deal with the context of a particular account of the ideal state; a model of the ideal state is reacting and responding to a local problem, which is a particular formulation of some problem in its author's historical context. The key difference is where the shining beacon conception of ideal state theory gives us a general or universal solution that might apply locally, the local problem conception gives us a particular solution that might also apply generally. Using the bridge analogy from earlier, the local problem is a particular river across which an author is seeking to construct a bridge; the bridge must respond to local conditions. It might be the case that the plans for a particular bridge could be used for a different river, but it is not guaranteed. Even though authors tend to think they are just offering shining beacon versions of the ideal state, they are also responding to a local problem. In the next chapter, we will examine just how an ideal state goes about solving a local problem, using two examples whose local application is well understood: More's *Utopia* and Rousseau's *Social Contract*.

2. Base Cases: More's *Utopia* and Rousseau's *Social Contract*

We have considered the ideal state as a general category, and found that there are some assumptions made about it that are not well-founded: though intuitively attractive, we have found that an ideal state does not need to be a blueprint, nor a perfect society, nor eternal. We can now turn to specific ideal states to examine how they relate to their individual context. I argue that models of the ideal state can be usefully read as responses to particular challenges observed by their authors—what I call local problems. Moreover, I argue that an ideal state can legitimately be read in this way even when its author describes their project as a general solution to the problem of how society ought to be organised. In this chapter, we analyse two base cases, two examples of the ideal state whose application to their particular local conditions is reasonably well understood by scholars. We will use these cases to demonstrate the process by which an ideal state can be said to solve a local problem, and apply that process to our three main case studies in subsequent chapters.

As a first step, we should satisfy ourselves that all the texts we are investigating do actually offer an account of the ideal state. Otherwise, we might run into the not unreasonable objection that this is all very interesting, but such-and-such a text does not describe an ideal state, so the argument does not apply. Accordingly, we start by demonstrating that all five texts meet the description of an ideal state as we gave it in the previous chapter. We do not need to examine *Republic*, as we have been taking its status as an account of the ideal state as given. We take the other texts in chronological order.

In crafting his imaginary society of Utopia, Thomas More adopts the method for designing an ideal state as devised by Plato and Aristotle, which does not simply consist of pulling together all the good features one can think of. The basic principle is to include everything necessary to the happiness of the citizens, and nothing else.[1] This is the process of idealisation, as we saw in the previous chapter. Raphael Hythloday, the character who has recently returned from Utopia and is describing it to Peter Giles and More (or, more accurately, to their characters—more on this below), finishes his account by saying 'now I have described to you as accurately as I could the structure of that commonwealth which I consider not only the best but indeed the only one that can rightfully claim that name' (U:

---

[1] George M. Logan, Introduction to Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. George M. Logan, trans. Robert M. Adams, Third ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), xxviii.

109). *Utopia*, therefore, is an account of the best possible political organisation. The narrative style of describing a supposedly currently-existing society helps here as well: the best state—Utopia—is described as though it is part of the here and now, which means it accounts for human nature as it is.[2] Nor does Utopia require an overly beneficent nature, because it is made a part of the world as it is. Nature is just as capricious in Utopia as it is the rest of the (real) world. *Utopia* describes the best possible political organisation, based on assumptions about what people and nature are actually like. There is a strongly implied normativity to this account, as we will see. *Utopia* meets all the elements of our definition of an ideal state, so we are justified as describing it as such.

Leviathan is certainly a theory of the state and Thomas Hobbes has been called the greatest theorist of the state,[3] so we are halfway there already. Though he describes his project as a descriptive analysis, Hobbes is giving a normative account of how a state *ought* to be put together; he is not trying to explain how they actually have been constructed.[4] This account of the state is based on a theory of human nature, for in order to describe the commonwealth, or state, which is 'but an artificial man, though of greater stature and strength than the natural', we must consider 'First, the *matter* thereof, and the *artificer*, both which is *man*'. (Introduction, 1-2, Hobbes's emphasis). Interestingly, this is the reverse of Plato's procedure: where he uses justice in the state as a way of understanding justice in the individual,[5] Hobbes wants us to understand the state by first understanding the individuals who create and constitute it. The arrangement Hobbes prescribes is to be contrasted with the state of nature, in which human life is famously 'nasty, brutish, and short' (xiii, 9). The ideal state, then, is intended to get people 'out from that miserable condition of war, which is necessarily consequent . . . to the natural passions of men, when there is no visible power to keep them in awe' (xvii, 1). This ideal state is the best possible, for it is the only arrangement which provides security against the state of nature. We will talk much more about the state of nature and Hobbes's ideal state in Chapter 4.[6]

---

[2] Roland Schaer, "Utopia: Space, Time, History," in *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*, ed. Roland Schaer, Gregory Claeys, and Lyman Tower Sargent (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with The New York Public Library, 2000), 3.

[3] John L. Campbell and John A. Hall, *The World of States* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 1.

[4] Richard Peters, *Hobbes* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956), 75.

[5] Though they both start by exploring the possibilities and limits of human nature.

[6] There is an added complication here in that Hobbes allows for different kinds of genuine commonwealth—monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy—and he strongly implies that monarchy is the best. We might think, then, that for Hobbes a monarchy is the true ideal, and aristocracy or democracy only a distant second. There is something to be said for that, but it is worth noting that we can see the same thing in Plato. The city of pigs,

Once we conclude that *Leviathan* contains an account of the ideal state, it is not too great a leap to accept that Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract* contains one as well, for many of the same reasons which apply to Hobbes apply just as well to Rousseau. The *Social Contract*, like *Leviathan*, is describing how a rational state *ought* to be constructed rather than trying to explain how they *are* constructed. Rousseau's theory of human nature—in the *Social Contract*, at least—is much less detailed than Hobbes's, but Rousseau is explicitly 'taking men as they are and laws as they can be' (I.Preface). The society Rousseau describes is the best possible, for it is the only truly legitimate society; he tries to 'set forth the true principles of political right and . . . to ground the State on this basis' (IV.9). Richard Tuck considers *Leviathan* and the *Social Contract* to both be ideal states.[7] Tuck is working in the opposite direction to us: he says *Leviathan* is as utopian a work as the *Social Contract*. It is interesting, and indicative of just how prevalent the pejorative sense of "utopian" is, to note that Céline Spector concludes that the *Social Contract* is *not* utopian, in contrast to Plato's *Republic*, because of its historical grounding—that is, because of its local application.[8]

That *Republic* and *Utopia* contain a model of the ideal state is uncontroversial; that *Leviathan* and the *Social Contract* do so as well can be accepted without too much difficulty. However, we might balk at the thought of considering Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels as ideal state theorists, particularly in the *Communist Manifesto*. A model of the ideal state is based on certain assumptions about the way people actually are, often on a theory of human nature. But it is common to deny that Marx and Engels have a theory of human nature.[9] Further, they themselves assert that 'the theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes' (*MECW* 6: 498).[10]

---

which we talked about briefly in the previous chapter, is for Socrates at least the true ideal, but he compromises with Glaucon to construct the slightly less ideal state—though it is still ideal. This question of the two-stage kind of ideal state is an interesting one, but too lengthy for us to deal with here. For the purposes of this thesis, we will take Hobbes's genuine commonwealth as an ideal state, with the acknowledgement that there are multiple ways of realising that ideal and some of them are perhaps better than others.

[7] Richard Tuck, "The Utopianism of Leviathan," in *Leviathan after 350 Years*, ed. Tom Sorrell and Luc Foisneau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 125.

[8] Céline Spector, *Rousseau* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), 63.

[9] Karsten J. Struhl, "Marx and Human Nature: The Historical, the Trans-Historical, and Human Flourishing," *Science and Society* 80, no. 1 (2016): 78.

[10] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 6: Marx and Engels: 1845-48* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976).

Indeed, the collapse of the bourgeoisie and the development of communist society are 'equally inevitable' (*MECW* 6: 496). On this account, Marx and Engels are simply describing the way things are, not giving a normative account at all; their project is one of prediction rather than prescription. It is a predetermined development, which moves inexorably towards the revolution and the new, classless society—though it has been suggested that this is an overly hasty conclusion to draw.[11] Marx and Engels are not alone in claiming that communism is not utopian; Vladimir Lenin, for instance, remarks that 'there is no trace of Utopianism in Marx, in the sense of inventing or imagining a "new" society'.[12] Perhaps one of the reasons Marx and Engels distanced themselves from utopianism was an attempt to demonstrate that their version of socialism was superior to other varieties. Marx and Engels labelled other people's socialism as "utopian", in the pejorative sense of the word we talked about in Chapter 1. Their own socialism, on the other hand, was "scientific".[13] The argument that Marx's thought is not utopian is, Claeys argues, disingenuous at best, intellectually dishonest at worst.[14]

There is a clearly normative aspect to the *Communist Manifesto*, for the ideal communist society which is presented as the end-point of history is the pinnacle of social development.[15] Though Marx and Engels claim to be describing things as they are, like Hobbes and Rousseau, they are describing things as they ought to be. There is, further, a clear aspirational element to this ideal society. It is eagerly anticipated and should be brought into being at the first available opportunity. The *Manifesto* is explicitly a call to revolution, culminating in the ringing call of 'WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!' (*MECW* 6: 519). There is something going on in the *Communist Manifesto* which looks remarkably like an account of the ideal state. The communist state is presented as a society 'in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all' (*MECW* 6: 506), in contrast with the exploitative systems which precede it. Gregory Claeys's definition of utopianism, recall, is 'a process of imagining much better or ideal (but not "perfect") societies, which serve as models to judge the inadequacies of the present'.[16] When we

---

[11] Sven-Eric Liedman, *A World to Win: The Life and Works of Karl Marx*, trans. Jeffrey N. Skinner (London and New York: Verso, 2018), 264.
[12] V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 272. Quoted in Claeys, *Marx and Marxism*, 232.
[13] Kumar, *Utopia & Anti-Utopia*, 51.
[14] Claeys, *Marx and Marxism*, 232.
[15] This provides an interesting contrast with Plato. His ideal city can be achieved at any time, provided only that philosophers come to rule, whereas for Marx the ideal state is the end point of a historical process.
[16] Claeys, *Marx and Marxism*, 231.

consider Marx's account of the changes to bring the new society into being, when we consider the brief glimpses of the future communist society we are given, we might conclude, with Krishan Kumar, that Marx's vision of the future is 'more dazzling in its utopianism than that of even the most utopian of utopian socialists'.[17] There is not a good case for rejecting Marx and Engels as ideal state theorists out of hand, so we will explore their utopian characteristics in more detail in Chapter Five.

The main task of this chapter is to examine two well-known accounts of the ideal state. Here we are looking at ideal states which are understood by scholars as providing particular solutions to local problems. The intent is to use these as base cases: examples where the phenomenon is understood will help us to apply the pattern to our other texts. We begin with More's *Utopia*, then Rousseau's *Social Contract*.

2.1 Voyage to Nowhere: Thomas More and *Utopia*

Utopia is useful to us as a base case for two reasons. More's ideal society seems to be well understood by scholars as a particular solution to a local problem, and this local focus seems to be deliberate. We can use *Utopia* to illustrate the process of how an ideal state solves a local problem, then show that authors who take themselves to be offering simply a general solution—the shining beacon on the hill, independent of any particular problems or context—are following the same process. In his presentation of the ideal society, More famously blends fact and fiction, describing Utopia as a real place—indeed, there were those who took him at his word.[18] More's ideal state in *Utopia* solves the problem of inequality resulting from private property, as epitomised by the sixteenth century enclosure movement. It is interesting, though perhaps unsurprising, that More's analysis of the problem does not quite match up with how modern historians have analysed it. We start by putting the work into context, and discussing More's process in writing it.

---

[17] Kumar, *Utopia & Anti-Utopia*, 53.
[18] The second edition of *Utopia* (1517) included a letter from More to Peter Giles, discussing the reactions of a person—who, to be fair, More may have invented—to the fact-or-fiction question of the book. More notes in a tongue-in-cheek passage that, had he intended to write a fictional account of such a society, he would have given some clues to allow those with sufficient knowledge to realise the account was fictional. More says that 'if I had merely given such names to the governor, the river, the city and the island as would indicate to the knowing reader that the island was nowhere, the city a phantom, the river waterless and the governor without a people, it wouldn't have been hard to do, and would have been far more clever than what I actually did' (U: 115). As it is, this is precisely what the names do mean.

The chronology of *Utopia*'s composition suggests an evolution in More's thinking about his project as it developed. Indeed, it has been argued that retracing More's steps in writing *Utopia* is the only way of understanding its complexity.[19] The text is divided into two Books. Book I is a dialogue about whether a philosopher ought to enter practical politics, to offer counsel to monarchs; Book II is a description of Utopia, its institutions and people. J. H. Hexter labels the two sections 'the Dialogue of Counsel' and 'the Discourse of Utopia'.[20] Book II was written first, at Peter Giles's house in Antwerp in the summer of 1515. More and Giles had been introduced by their mutual friend, Erasmus.[21] Indeed, it is Erasmus who gives us a clue as to how *Utopia* was written; he says that More wrote Book II while at leisure, then added Book I 'in the heat of the moment'.[22] While More was 'at leisure', he was in Antwerp during a break in negotiations from a diplomatic mission to Bruges, in Flanders (modern Belgium).[23] Hexter argues that when More left Antwerp, *Utopia* was a finished work, and it was only once he got back to London, in about October 1515, that he was compelled in 'the heat of the moment' to add anything to it.[24] When he sent the finished manuscript to Erasmus for publication in September 1516, More enclosed a letter to Peter Giles, which is often included as an introduction to the text of *Utopia*. He begins that letter by apologising for taking so long to have finished the work, saying that 'I am almost ashamed to be sending you after nearly a year this little book about the Utopian commonwealth, which I'm sure you expected in less than six weeks' (U: 3). As Hexter points out, six weeks is not a long time to polish and correct a manuscript and get a clean copy made for a man as busy as More was. In these circumstances Giles could only have expected to see the book again so soon if it were almost completed.[25] Most of Book II—the Discourse of Utopia—had been written in Antwerp, and the remainder—the Dialogue of Counsel—was written in London. The fact that Book I was written later suggests a shift in More's thinking. Any criticisms of England as it was in More's day are necessarily implicit in Book II, but there are explicit criticisms of England made in Book I, though these criticisms are still veiled in what Paul Turner calls the

---

[19] Alistair Fox, *Politics and Literature in the Reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 93.

[20] J.H. Hexter, *More's Utopia: The Biography of an Idea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952), v-vi.

[21] Wilde, *More's Utopia*, 10.

[22] Dominic Baker-Smith, "Reading *Utopia*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More*, ed. George M. Logan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 148.

[23] Alistair Fox, *Utopia: An Elusive Vision* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 3. It is an interesting coincidence that the treaties the mission was renegotiating concerned the Anglo-Dutch wool and textile trade; the increasing production of wool is an important aspect of the local problem which More identifies. Cathy Curtis, "More's Public Life," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More*, ed. George M. Logan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 73.

[24] Hexter, *More's Utopia*, 28.

[25] Ibid., 29.

'sanctity of ambiguity' of the fictional form in which More is writing,[26] an ambiguity which protected More. It might be that More realised his Discourse of Utopia could be used to criticise the politics of his own day and decided to make the target of his criticisms clearer in Book I. It is also possible, of course, that it was his object from the outset to criticise English politics.

The way More describes his project in *Utopia* is slightly different to many other authors, because of the fictional framework in which he is working. More's stated intention in his work is 'to relate only what he [Hythloday] told us about the customs and institutions of the Utopians' (U: 13). On the surface, this is just an interesting book about a place we might want to learn about purely on its own merits. This is a difficulty inherent in the narrative style More adopts: as we noted in the previous chapter, the characteristic feature of utopias is that a utopia describes a society as it *is*, rather than as it *should be*.[27] More's expectations for the work are similarly difficult to discern, in part because of the dialogue style he adopts. *Utopia* is a fictional conversation between More, Giles, and the fictional Raphael Hythloday,[28] recently returned to Europe from the island of Utopia. The conversation reads like a play-script; the reader is able to witness it but cannot participate; there is a "fourth wall" in place between the characters and the reader, though only Book I is really a dialogue; Book II is almost entirely one character speaking. However, that More's *Utopia* intends to comment on contemporary society is implied by its full title: 'On the Best State of a Commonwealth and on the New Island of Utopia' (U: 1)—had More wished only to describe the island of Utopia he would presumably have titled his work "On the New Island of Utopia".[29] The narrative structure implies that Utopia can offer us lessons on how to improve our own societies: hence More's observation at the end of the book that 'in the Utopian commonwealth there are very many features that in our own societies I would wish rather than expect to see' (U: 113). There is a question of whether Hythloday should be taken as the voice of the author, or if the character of More aligns better with the author's positions. More's own position is probably

---

[26] Paul Turner, Introduction to Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. and trans. Paul Turner (London: Penguin, 1965), 10.
[27] Though, as we also noted, this is by no means a strict or rigid difference.
[28] More's affinity for names emerges here again. "Hythloday" can be translated as "well-learned in nonsense", and Raphael is an angel in the Bible, whose name means "the healing of God". Sargent, "Five Hundred Years," 185.
[29] Paul Kincaid, "*Utopia* in Context," *Foundation* 45, no. 124 (2016): 10.

somewhere between the two.[30] To help keep More the character separate from More the author, I follow Lawrence Wilde in referring to the character by his Latin name, Morus.[31]

The first part of the book, as noted earlier, is a discussion on whether Hythloday should get involved in practical politics, to offer counsel to politicians. Hythloday thinks it would be futile, while Morus argues for it. One section of Book I is particularly important to our purposes; it is in this section that More explicitly criticises the inequality of his own day, thereby describing the local problem which his ideal state solves. Hythloday recounts a conversation he had with a lawyer while they were both dinner guests at the house of Cardinal John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor to Henry VII.[32] The lawyer boasts about the effectiveness of executing thieves, who Hythloday reports as saying that 'as many as twenty at a time being hanged on a single gallows. And then he declared he was amazed that so many thieves sprang up everywhere when so few of them escaped hanging' (U: 16). Hythloday retorts that 'the penalty is too harsh in itself, yet it isn't an effective deterrent. Simple theft is not so great a crime that it ought to cost a man his head, yet no punishment however severe can restrain those from robbery who have no other way to make a living' (U: 16). There are a number of causes for someone turning to theft in order to survive, Hythloday argues, and one of them is the enclosing of the land. This forces tenants out of their homes, with little money, and when that runs out it is unsurprising that they turn to theft. Hythloday concludes that

> your policy may look superficially like justice, but in reality it is neither just nor expedient. If
> you allow young folk to be abominably brought up and their characters corrupted, little by
> little, from childhood; and if then you punish them as grown-ups for committing the crimes to
> which their training has consistently inclined them, what else is this, I ask, but first making
> them thieves and then punishing them for it? (U: 21).

Immediately after recounting this conversation, Hythloday opines that 'unless private property is entirely abolished, there can be no fair or just distribution of goods, nor can the business of mortals be conducted happily' (U: 40). Morus objects to this, arguing that if people stop working, there will be shortages, and that the motivation for work is the 'hope of

---

[30] Wilde, *More's Utopia*, 26.

[31] Ibid., 2.

[32] Morton was important in More's own life. In 1490, at the age of about twelve, More had been sent to serve as a page in Morton's household; the time he spent there had a lasting effect on him. It was Morton who sent More to Oxford to continue his education. Caroline M. Barron, "The Making of a London Citizen," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More*, ed. George M. Logan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 9; Curtis, "More's Public Life," 71.

gain', so by relying on others we will become lazy. Abolition of private property, Morus thinks, will lead to 'continual bloodshed and turmoil' (U: 41). These objections derive from Aristotle's critique of Plato's *Republic*.[33] Hythloday is unsurprised, but declares that if Morus had been with him in Utopia—where Hythloday lived for five years—'you would frankly confess that you had never seen a well-governed people anywhere but there' (U: 41). Giles and Morus urge Hythloday to tell them more about the island, and after a break for lunch, Hythloday launches into a discourse on Utopia—that is, Book II.

It has long been acknowledged that More uses *Utopia* to comment on contemporary problems. Erasmus wrote that *Utopia* was written 'with the purpose of showing the reasons for the shortcomings of a commonwealth', and that More had 'represented the English commonwealth in particular, because he had studied it and knew it best'.[34] Generations of historians have recognised *Utopia* as a 'distorted but very revealing mirror of its age'.[35] Indeed, R.W. Chambers notes that *Utopia* is in part a protest against the enclosure movement.[36] Some authors do not go into detail about just how the mirror reflects the age, though, and which features it magnifies. Claeys, for instance, merely notes that 'the historical context expressed by More's *Utopia* was the destruction of the peasantry in order to make way for large-scale capitalist agricultural production, in this case, of wool'.[37] Claeys is not alone in identifying the development of capitalism as the problem More identifies; Mikael Hörnqvist says that *Utopia* 'precociously comments on the effects of early capitalist exploitation in England'.[38] Wilde spells things out more clearly, noting that Hythloday objects to the 'conspiracy of the rich' by which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, and the rich cloak their self-interest by claiming to act for the public good (U: 104-5). Private property is the root of this problem, according to Wilde.[39] When More presents his description of Utopian society in Book II, Quentin Skinner argues that he must be taken as offering the only possible solution to the social evils he outlines in Book I, which suggests that 'in giving *Utopia* the title of "the best state of a commonwealth", he must have meant

---

[33] More, *Utopia*, 41, n. 95. Aristotle says that 'the partnerships of fellow-travellers are an example to the point; for they generally fall out over everyday matters and quarrel about any trifle which turns up'. Aristotle, "Politics," 1263a16-19.
[34] John Guy, *Thomas More* (London: Arnold, 2000), 92.
[35] Kincaid, "*Utopia* in Context," 12.
[36] R.W. Chambers, *Thomas More* (London: Penguin, 1935), 124.
[37] Claeys, "News from Somewhere," 172.
[38] Mikael Hörnqvist, "Renaissance Political Philosophy," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. George Klosko (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 215.
[39] Wilde, *More's Utopia*, 55.

exactly what he said'.[40] More uses the ideal state in *Utopia* to solve the problem of inequality caused by greed, as manifested in his own day by the enclosure movement and private property more generally. He presents his ideal state as a general solution to the problem of social organisation, but what he is actually doing—and consciously doing—is solving a particular problem in the England of his day.

There is relatively little information available about how More's work was received by his contemporaries. We do know that *Utopia* was very popular. The two parts were published separately in England, with Part II published first. It was an immediate success, but the satire of Part I was felt to be so biting that it was not published until after More's death.[41] Gregory Claeys suggests that the most popular way to read *Utopia* was a realistic one; it was used as a blueprint for an ideal society, first in the 1530s but as late as the twentieth century.[42] As noted earlier (see note 21 above), one of the possible reactions was to take *Utopia* seriously as a description of a distant and newly discovered land.

2.1.1 England's Green and Pleasant Land: Tudor Enclosure

As More is explicit in identifying the local problem against which he is reacting, we can begin by seeing how he describes it in *Utopia*, before we look at the secondary evidence. During the conversation about capital punishment at Morton's house, Hythloday identifies a factor which drives people to theft. The shift from arable farming to pasture had forced many tenants off their land and into poverty. As Hythloday puts it, English sheep, which used to be 'so meek and eat so little; now, as I hear, they have become so greedy and fierce that they devour human beings themselves. They devastate and depopulate fields, houses, and towns' (U: 19). On Hythloday's account, landlords—gentry, nobility, even clergy—have found that wool yields higher profits than crop farming, so have converted arable land to pasture in order to maximise their own gains; Hythloday says that 'living in idleness and luxury without doing society any good no longer satisfies them; they have to do positive harm' (U:19). As a result, tenants have been driven off their land, and, unable to support themselves, are forced into poverty. This, in turn, drives them to theft (U: 19-20). Additionally, the decrease in crop

---

[40] Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1: The Renaissance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 262.
[41] Kincaid, "*Utopia* in Context", 11.
[42] Gregory Claeys, "*Utopia* at Five Hundred: Some Reflections," *Utopian Studies* 27, no. 3, SPECIAL ISSUE: On the Commemoration of the Five Hundredth Anniversary of Thomas More's *Utopia* Part II (2016): 405.

production has led to rising food prices (U: 20). The price of wool itself has risen so that poor people who used to make woollen cloth can no longer afford to do so and are similarly forced into poverty (U: 20). All of these factors contribute to people turning to theft in order to survive. This culminates in Hythloday's remark that contemporary society, in executing thieves, is punishing them for what it has forced them to become (U: 21). The local problem as Hythloday describes it is that landlords, seeking to maximise profits, force tenants off their land and into poverty; these evicted tenants eventually turn to theft for survival.

The local problem is epitomised by what modern historians call the enclosure movement. "Enclosure" is a catch-all term for the processes by which common fields used by villagers to grow crops or for communal grazing were converted to privately-owned pasture for livestock, especially for production of wool.[43] There are several processes involved, including but not limited to removing common property rights, changing farm boundaries, and amalgamating smaller farms into larger properties.[44] By 1500 about 45 percent of England was already enclosed;[45] by 1700, enclosures covered some 70 percent of the country.[46] Rent for pasture was considerably higher than that for arable,[47] which fits well with Hythloday's description of landlords seeking to maximise their profits.

Hythloday's diagnosis of the problem does not match up with the way modern historians assess it, most likely due to the evidence available more than to any error in reasoning on More's part. The fact that More's diagnosis is misdirected should not concern us, however. The ideal state is used as a cure for present ills. In other words, it aims to solve what the author considers to be a current problem. The solution More proposes here will naturally be directed against what he perceives to be a problem, even though we would say he was mistaken in what the problem actually was. When we say that enclosure was the local problem against which More was reacting, we are saying that enclosure was the problem *for More*, and against which he was reacting. The fact that he is attacking the result rather than

---

[43] Wilde, *More's Utopia*, 2.

[44] Mark Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy 1500-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 147. Though Overton puts amalgamation under the general heading of enclosure, this particular process might more accurately be called 'engrossing', which is related but not necessarily identical to enclosure. John A.F. Thomson, *The Transformation of Medieval England, 1370-1529* (London and New York: Longman, 1983), 40.

[45] Overton, *Agricultural Revolution*, 148.

[46] Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 326.

[47] Overton, *Agricultural Revolution*, 159.

the cause need not worry us.[48] In the interests of completeness, however, it is interesting to briefly discuss what the local problem actually was. Enclosure was at least in part an attempt by landlords to stabilise their incomes in response to the economic depression of the fifteenth century.[49] This depression was largely thanks to the demographic catastrophe of the Black Death. England's pre-plague population was about five million; by 1377 it had halved, and did not recover fully until the 1630s, although the scale of population loss, and the slow recovery, was not known at the time.[50] This helps us to understand why landlords were disposed to enclose land, as there was a shortage of tenants.[51] For our purposes, More could not be clearer in describing what he thought the local problem was: private property, and the greed of pursuing profit at the expense of others, is the problem which the Utopian society is designed to solve. With that in mind, let us see just how that Utopians manage to avoid the inequality caused by private property.

2.1.2 Utopian Property

The local problem, as More sees it, is a 'conspiracy of the rich' who desire personal gain, accumulating property at the expense of others. The ideal state solves this problem by abolishing private property completely, and creates a society with a strong emphasis on sharing and cooperation. This section explores the consequences of More's solution to the problem of private property—that is, just what the Utopian society looks like—and how the institutions More proposes contribute to solving that problem. We will see that Utopian society emphasises equality, and requires everybody to participate in labour; there are no landlords to reap the profit, and no "idle class" as More identifies in the England of his day.

The structure of agriculture in Utopia is designed to avoid a profit motive, and to provide for everyone's needs. Each of the fifty-four cities of the island,[52] is at the centre of a circle of farmland at least twelve miles in radius. Farmhouses are set at 'proper intervals' over this farmland, inhabited by citizens who come to the countryside from the city for two-year stints.

---

[48] Thomson, *Transformation*, 40.
[49] Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, 104.
[50] E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871: A Reconstruction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), 208-09; Christopher Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The People of Britain, 850-1520* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 265. More might have been aware that the recovering population was beginning to put pressure on available land. Thomson, *Transformation*, 33.
[51] Thomson, *Transformation*, 18.
[52] The same number as the counties of England and Wales, plus London. More, *Utopia*, 44-45, n.6.

Each household has at least forty inhabitants, as well as two slaves bound to the land.[53] The inhabitants rotate back to the city twenty at a time, to be replaced by others coming out to serve their two years on the land (U: 45). When harvest time comes, as many people as are needed turn out to help, so that in good weather the entire crop can be harvested in a single day (U: 46). From the outset, the description of Utopian society emphasises community, central planning, and a focus on the common good. Farming is not undertaken in pursuit of profit, its only focus is on providing food for the populace.

One of the problems associated with private property is the envy of others, a desire for wealth, and the disorder which follows from this. The desirability of order is a theme running through More's writings—especially *Utopia* and his later *History of Richard III*—perhaps contrasting the disorder of Richard III's reign with the order of the new Tudor regime.[54] To maintain order and stability, More's ideal society has very little space for individuality or individual expression. Their cities, which are all built so far as possible on the same plan, have blocks of three-storey houses, each block built around a central garden (U: 48).[55] The houses have no locks, and are open to all. Utopians swap houses every ten years. Thus there is no space for personalising one's dwelling. However, Hythlodays tells us that Utopians are very fond of gardening, and each block of houses competes among themselves to have the best garden (U: 48). This is one of the few explicitly-mentioned spaces for personal expression in the whole society, and even this must be abandoned every ten years.[56] Clothing is similarly devoid of personality; it is 'the same throughout the whole island and throughout one's lifetime, and which is by no means unattractive, does not hinder bodily movement and serves for warm as well as cold weather'. Each family makes their own clothes (U: 51). Towards the end of *Utopia*, Morus objects to the communal economy of Utopia on the basis that it 'utterly subverts all the nobility, magnificence, splendour and majesty which (in the

---

[53] These might perhaps more properly be termed serfs rather than slaves, but slaves is the term More uses, and it reflects the Utopian version of slavery. Slaves are either prisoners of war (U: 81), or those convicted of 'the gravest crimes' (U: 85). Utopian slavery seems to be a kind of convict labour. Children of slaves are not born into slavery. The Utopians choose slavery as a punishment for its deterrent value and because the labour of slaves is more useful to society than capital punishment. Slaves are 'permanent and visible reminders that crime does not pay' (U: 85). As Wilde notes, while Utopia has slaves, it is not a slave economy as slaves do not play a major structural role, as they did in the southern states of the US prior to emancipation, or, indeed, in Plato's Athens. Wilde, *More's Utopia*, 65.

[54] Kincaid, "*Utopia* in Context," 5.

[55] Brian Goodey offers some useful sketches of what Utopian cities might look like, including the arrangement of city blocks. Brian R. Goodey, "Mapping "Utopia": A Comment on the Geography of Sir Thomas More," *Geographical Review* 60, no. 1 (1970): 24, 27.

[56] One area for personal expression which More does not mention might be carpentry, where presumably a carpenter may choose to design furniture to be aesthetically pleasing as well as functional.

popular view) are the true ornaments and glory of any commonwealth' (U: 113). By removing individual expression and ensuring things like houses and clothing are fairly consistent throughout Utopian society, More removes one of the main goals of private property. While wealth does seem to have a certain intrinsic value, in that we value it for its own sake, its main value is instrumental, as a means to an end. In Utopia, wealth does not have this instrumental value because there is nothing it can be used for. This removes a source of envy, and the disorder which can follow as a result of it.

The existence of private property allows for the existence of a non-productive class, who Hythloday describes as those who live 'in idleness and luxury without doing society any good' (U: 19). In Utopia, there is no such idle class. Everyone, men and women alike, works at farming, which they are taught from childhood. In addition, each person is taught another trade—cloth-making, masonry, metal-work, or carpentry seem to be the main options (U: 51). There are three classes in Utopia who are not required to work in agriculture, however: politicians, scholars, and priests. Each city has an assembly and a senate, the former made up of 200 syphogrants, or phylarchs, one elected from each group of thirty households.[57] The senate is made up of tranibors, or chief phylarchs, one for every ten syphogrants; it is not clear how they are selected. The tranibors also elect a governor for the city from a slate of four candidates, one recommended by each quarter of the city (U: 50). The governors occasionally meet in the capital, Amaurot,[58] but there is no governor for the island as a whole. There is also a national senate held annually, made up of three representatives from each city (so 162 in total), who consider affairs of common interest (U: 45). The scholars are important to Utopian intellectual life, which is a major focus of the ideal society. While scholars are elected, scholarly status can be revoked, and the scholar sent back to be a worker again—bringing new force to the old maxim "publish or perish".[59] In addition, a worker can be promoted to the scholarly class by showing dedication and progress in study (U: 54-5).

---

[57] More seems to have forgotten about the rural households here. For rural and urban households alike, there is one syphogrant for every thirty households. However, there are two hundred syphogrants in total. Later, Hythloday reports that every city contains six thousand households, excluding the rural households (U: 56). Either he has made a mistake, or the rural syphogrants do not participate in the assembly.

[58] Amaurot is chosen as the capital only because of its conveniently central location (U: 45).

[59] Guy, *Thomas More*, 86. We are not told what works the scholars produce, but there is the intriguing possibility that Utopian education would follow Erasmian humanism in stressing the practical, ethical conclusions to be drawn from religious foundations. Elsewhere, More stresses the close relationship between learning and virtue. John M. Parrish, "Education, Erasmian Humanism, and More's *Utopia*," in *Ideas of Education: Philosophy and Politics from Plato to Dewey*, ed. Christopher Brooke and Elizabeth Frazer (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 68, 77.

From this scholarly class are chosen ambassadors, priests, tranibors, and the governor (U: 55). Utopia does not have one religion; some worship the sun, or the moon, or distant ancestors. Hythloday reports that Utopians were ready converts to Christianity, however (U: 97-98). There are no more than thirteen priests in each city, 'one for each church' (U: 103). They are responsible for educating the young—though, as Logan notes here, they surely only supervise the teaching as the students would number in the thousands.[60] Interestingly, women are eligible to be priests, though it is not common to elect a woman to the priesthood. Further, Utopian priests are not forbidden to marry (U: 104). Though the syphogrants are exempt from having to work, they often choose to work anyway, in order to set a good example (U: 54). They are also responsible for ensuring that nobody slacks off work; their role is coordination, equivalent to a work director in the Israeli *kibbutzim* of the twentieth century.[61] An equivalent closer to More's time might be that the syphogrants are similar to the Common Council of London, while the tranibors are similar to the city's aldermen, who advised the mayor.[62] One of the greatest benefits of having such a high proportion of the population in the workforce is that only six hours a day are devoted to work (U: 52). More notes that this is ample to provide all that is necessary for life, pointing out that 'you will easily appreciate this if you consider how large a part of the population in other countries lives without doing any work at all' (U: 53). However, More seems to have neglected that women will work harder than men; they are responsible for cooking and childcare as well as farm labour and their own trade.[63] When they are not working, eating, or sleeping, Utopians like to devote themselves to intellectual pursuits, commonly rising before dawn for public lectures (U: 53).[64] It is, Hythloday reports, the chief aim of the Utopian constitution that 'all citizens should be free to withdraw as much time as possible from the service of the body and devote themselves to the freedom and culture of the mind. For in that, they think, lies the happiness of life' (U: 56). The six-hour day provides more free time than any workers in Europe could have contemplated, and the way Utopians use their leisure time reveals More's own austere and intellectual temperament.[65] There are, for instance, no brothels or ale-houses in Utopia (U: 62).

---

[60] More, *Utopia*, 104 n. 32.
[61] Wilde, *More's Utopia*, 64.
[62] Baker-Smith, "Reading *Utopia*," 151.
[63] Guy, *Thomas More*, 87.
[64] These lectures are presumably delivered by the scholars; More does not say definitely. There seems to be a range of available topics, as 'depending on their interests, some go to one lecture, some to another' (U: 53).
[65] Wilde, *More's Utopia*, 74.

As a consequence of the abolition of private property, the money economy is also abolished, which removes another source of disorder as well as abolishing poverty. There are markets in the middle of each quarter of the cities, and produce is stored there in large warehouses. The head of each household comes and takes whatever is needed, with no need for payment: there is plenty of everything, and no reason to think anyone will take more than necessary. Hythloday says that 'fear of want, no doubt, makes every living creature greedy and rapacious, and man, besides, develops these qualities out of sheer pride, which glories in getting ahead of others by a superfluous display of possessions. But this sort of vice has no place whatever in the Utopian scheme of things' (U: 58). Further, Utopians have very little use for precious metals, which are used to make chamber pots and 'all their humblest vessels', as well as chains and shackles for slaves (U: 64). This is perhaps the clearest solution to the local problem. Private property leads to inequality, as some have more resources than others. The abolition of private property leads to a society where everyone is able to access what they need.

Maintaining a society like Utopia requires a lot of central planning, and population control is a good example of this planning. The intention is to create a more mutually-beneficial society than the one which More observed. To this end, the population of Utopia is kept fairly static, though there does not seem to be any control on reproduction mentioned. Perhaps it did not occur to More than one might be needed. The population is kept static by a quota system. Each city has six thousand households, not including the rural households we mentioned earlier. Each household has a population of between ten and sixteen adults; should a city fall below quota, citizens from other cities move in to address the shortfall (U: 56). The population of each city will be between 60,000 and 96,000; the whole island's population is between 3.2 and 5.2 million.[66] Should the population of the whole island grow too large, some citizens from each city are dispatched to form a colony elsewhere (U: 57). Further, movement of individuals is controlled. Travel within the island requires a letter from the governor, granting permission to travel and fixing a date of return (U: 61). Anyone who travels without this passport is brought back to their home and punished; repeat offenders are enslaved—there is no prison system, and Utopian slavery can possibly be justified on utilitarian grounds as being more beneficial than either prison or the death penalty.[67] Those

---

[66] The upper limit of Utopia's population is thus more than twice the population of England in 1516. The only limit on population seems to be the requirement that a household have between ten and sixteen adults.

[67] Wilde, *More's Utopia*, 76.

who wish to stroll around their own districts are free to do so, 'provided he first obtains his father's permission and his spouse's consent'. But such an individual will not be allowed to eat in the dining halls until completing either a morning's or an afternoon's stint of work (U: 61). Here again we see the importance of a centrally planned society for Utopia to function properly, as well as the necessity of cooperation. There is no room in Utopia for the idle class, 'given to ostentatious dress and gourmandising', which Hythloday attacks in Book I (U: 21).

Once Hythloday has finished his description of Utopia, towards the end of Book II, he remarks that

> everyone knows that if money were abolished, fraud, theft, robbery, quarrels, brawls, altercations, seditions, murders, treasons, poisonings and a whole set of crimes which are avenged but not prevented by the hangman would at once die out. At the very moment when money disappeared, so would fear, anxiety, worry, toil and sleepless nights. Even poverty, the one condition which has always seemed to need money, would immediately decline if money were entirely abolished (U: 111).

The society of the Utopians is certainly a highly cooperative one. It is not clear that More was advocating for European countries to adopt the institutions presented in the book; though many people have taken Hythloday as the straightforward voice of the author, Morus voices several reservations about abolishing private property.[68] As we saw earlier, Morus reflects at the very end of Book II that 'while I can hardly agree with everything he [Hythloday] said (though he is a man of unquestionable learning and enormous experience of human affairs), yet I freely confess that in the Utopian commonwealth there are very many features that in our own societies I would wish rather than expect to see' (U: 113). Turner's translation of *Utopia* makes this last thought easier to parse in English: 'I freely admit that there are many features of the Utopian Republic which I should like – though I hardly expect – to see adopted in Europe'.[69] That is, Morus agrees that many features of Utopia are good, but does not think Europe is likely to adopt them. Though we have not discussed it here, as our focus was on addressing private property, it is interesting that Utopia still has to grapple with crime and foreign war, in part because a country without these things would have been unthinkable

---

[68] Baker-Smith, "Reading *Utopia*," 162.
[69] More, *Utopia*, ed. Turner, 132. It is worth noting that the reference to Europe is Turner's, not More's; More's Latin says 'in nostris ciuitatibus', or 'in our cities'. Turner's translation of the previous phrase is a bit clearer than Logan's translation, though Logan is probably a more literal translation.

for More's readers, but also because More wanted to show that there were better ways of dealing with these problems.[70]

Utopia solves the problems represented by private property, greed, and the existence of an idle class as they existed in the England of More's day, by abolishing private property altogether, and forging a highly cooperative, communal society. The communal society of Utopia directly solves the problem represented by enclosure in England, and this local focus was deliberate on More's part. This illustrates the process of how a model of the ideal state sets out to solve a local problem.

2.2 The *Social Contract* and the Citizen of Geneva

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Du Contrat Social* (*On the Social Contract*) is our second example of an ideal state which is understood by scholars as offering a particular solution to a local problem. Rousseau appears to be slightly more controversial than More, and it is not as obvious that the local application for his ideal state was deliberate. As before, we start by putting the *Social Contract* into context; though Rousseau describes his project as a general inquiry into what makes a state legitimate, it is actually directed at his home city of Geneva, in an attempt to remind his fellow citizens of the true order of things and to wrest control of the city back from the oligarchical factions which had developed there.

Rousseau's political project, which eventually became the *Social Contract*, dates from his time as secretary to the French ambassador to Venice. Rousseau took up this position in 1743; the job lasted less than a year.[71] While in Venice, he decided to write a comprehensive work on political systems, to be called *Political Institutions* (*Institutions Politiques*).[72] It is striking that it was practical experience which inspired his political reflections, though he was by no means alone in this: all the authors we are investigating have a similar story.[73] The work was eventually abandoned and ultimately burned, though before committing it to the flames Rousseau extracted the four books which make up the *Social Contract*.[74] The *Social*

---

[70] Kincaid, "*Utopia* in Context," 14.

[71] Matthew Simpson, *Rousseau: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2007), 11.

[72] Nicholas Dent, *Rousseau* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 124.

[73] Mads Qvortrup, *The Political Philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Impossibility of Reason* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 12.

[74] David Lay Williams, *Rousseau's Social Contract: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 23.

Contract was published in April 1762. The consequences for Rousseau were nothing short of catastrophic.[75] The books were banned in Paris and publicly burned in Geneva, along with *Emile*, another of Rousseau's works, published around the same time.[76] The French issued a warrant for Rousseau's arrest, and the Genevans banished him from the city.[77] Linda Kirk notes that it says something about the universality of Rousseau's arguments that they were found to be unacceptable by both a Catholic and a Protestant power; at the level of practical politics it is significant that the officially independent and fiercely Calvinist Geneva took its lead from Paris.[78] It is remarkable that two of the greatest works of the eighteenth century were published within a month of each other, by the same man, who was at the same time writing the best-selling novel of the century—*Julie, or the New Heloïse*—all while suffering delicate health. Despite the ban, the *Social Contract* appeared in no fewer than thirteen French editions in 1762 and 1763, as well as editions in English, German, and Russian at roughly the same time. It was, and is, the great book of the political revolution.[79]

The stated intention of the *Social Contract* is 'to explore whether in the civil order – taking men as they are and laws as they can be – there may be any legitimate and reliable rule of administration' (I.Preface). Rousseau claims to be simply describing, quasi-scientifically, the 'true principles of political right' (IV.9). However, it is clear that Rousseau is not describing existing political states; he is arguing for the way things ought to be. We ought to live in legitimate states, the only powers we are obliged to obey, rather than yielding to force out of necessity (I.3). Rousseau argues that the only legitimate basis for authority is convention— some sort of agreement, or a social contract (I.4). In this way Rousseau seeks to reconcile the freedom of the individual with the authority of the state.[80] The society he describes is the best possible one, for it is the only society with true moral legitimacy. Unfortunately, Rousseau does not give us many hints as to his expectations for the *Social Contract*. In this section we

---

[75] Dent, *Rousseau*, 15.
[76] The reception of the *Social Contract* was strongly affected by that of *Emile*, which was religiously unorthodox and caused a major scandal. Helena Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva: From the First Discourse to the Social Contract, 1749-1762* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 270.
[77] Simpson, *Rousseau: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 25-26.
[78] Linda Kirk, "Genevan Republicanism," in *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society 1649-1776*, ed. David Wootton (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 290.
[79] R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democractic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 90.
[80] Christopher Bertram, Introduction to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Of the Social Contract and Other Political Writings*, ed. Christopher Bertram, trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Penguin, 2012), xxiii.

will see how the discussion of legitimacy is an important contribution to a discussion going on in the Geneva of Rousseau's time; the solution proposed by his ideal state solves local problems in that context.

2.2.1 The *Social Contract* and the General Will

The general will is important to solving the problems Rousseau identifies in Geneva, as well as being key to his political philosophy. Indeed, the general will has been described as the most famous, most decisive, and most difficult concept in Rousseau's political philosophy.[81] Rousseau himself contributes to the difficulty, for he does not define the general will in anything like the kind of depth which such concepts typically demand.[82] Though it has been associated with Rousseau ever since he gave the general will a central place in his political philosophy,[83] he did not invent the concept; it was a seventeenth-century theological term.[84] David Lay Williams argues that the general will as Rousseau uses it cannot be simply defined, it can only be 'excavated'. To understand the general will, on Williams's account, requires us to understand Rousseau's commitments to popular sovereignty, justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity, among others. To achieve this, to properly excavate the general will, we need to read not only the *Social Contract*, but also Rousseau's other works on education, culture, the arts, economics, and politics.[85] Obviously that is more than we can hope to achieve here. Our focus here is on trying to understand how Rousseau puts the general will to work in his ideal state, and later we will see how it helps to solve problems in the Genevan context.

---

[81] Spector, *Rousseau*, 55.

[82] David Lay Williams, "The Substantive Elements of Rousseau's General Will," in *The General Will: The Evolution of a Concept*, ed. James Farr and David Lay Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 219.

[83] Patrick Riley, "The General Will before Rousseau: The Contributions of Arnauld, Pascal, Malebranch, Bayle, and Bossuet," in *The General Will: The Evolution of a Concept*, ed. James Farr and David Lay Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3. As an interesting aside which illustrates Rousseau's influence as well as that of the general will, Article 6 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, written in 1789, declares that 'the law is the expression of the general will'. Bryan Garsten, "Benjamin Constant's Liberalism and the Political Theology of the General Will," in *The General Will: The Evolution of a Concept*, ed. James Farr and David Lay Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 384.

[84] The way it was used in theological discussions revolved around whether God has a general will that humanity be saved, or a particular will that this or that person be saved. Riley, "The General Will before Rousseau: The Contributions of Arnauld, Pascal, Malebranch, Bayle, and Bossuet," 4-5.

[85] Williams, "Substantive Elements," 240.

To see how Rousseau puts the general will to work, we should start by seeing how he describes it in the *Social Contract*. We should note, also, that we are not seeking a coherent account of the general will; we will not tackle the difficult interpretative questions.[86] The closest we get to a definition of the general will is that 'so long as several men together consider themselves a single body, they have but a single will, which is directed towards their common preservation and general welfare' (IV.1). The general will looks like the common good of a community, derived from the shared interests of its members.[87] There is a distinction between the 'will of all' and the general will; by 'will of all' Rousseau perhaps means "wills of each" the sum of each individual's will taken together.[88] The will of all takes account of private interests, while the general will only considers what is in the common interest. Rousseau tells us that we should 'remove from these same wills the pluses and minuses that cancel each other out, and what is left as the sum of differences is the general will' (II.3). The general will is always right and always tends to the public good, but it does not follow that the people's decisions always follow it. Though we always want what is best for ourselves, we cannot always clearly see what that is. Rousseau says that 'the people is never corrupted, but it is often misled, and only then does it seem to will what is bad' (II.3). In a disunited State, Rousseau warns that the general will 'falls silent' (IV.1), but is not annihilated or damaged, for it is 'always unchanging, incorruptible and pure' (IV.1). The general will, then, is the collective will of the state, directed towards some goal, usually what it perceives as the common good.[89] It is distinct from personal interests, at least in theory. When trying to determine the general will, each citizen should ask themselves not "what do I want?", but "what is best for the community as a whole?"

---

[86] One significant difficulty about the general will in the *Social Contract* is that there are two possible conceptions of it, which Christopher Bertram calls the democratic conception and the transcendent conception. The democratic conception treats the general will as just the majority decision of a community; the transcendent conception says that there is a fact of the matter about what the general will *is*, which we can fail to discern correctly. Helena Rosenblatt compares this with the will of God, and argues that for Rousseau the general will is the will everyone *ought* to have, which operates in the domain of obligation, duty, and morality. There is an interesting tension between these two conceptions of the general will, and it is not clear which Rousseau prefers, or if he recognised the tension at all. Christopher Bertram, "Rousseau's Legacy in Two Conceptions of the General Will: Democratic and Transcendent," *The Review of Politics* 74, no. 3 (2012); Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva*, 255.

[87] Richard Whatmore, *Against War and Empire: Geneva, Britain, and France in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 54.

[88] Joshua Cohen, *Rousseau: A Free Community of Equals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 26.

[89] Rosenblatt's description of the general will is helpful here as well: 'to Rousseau, it was the rational will everyone *ought* to have and operated primarily in the domain of obligation, duty, and morality rather than in that of self-interest. It was the will of God, which was, in fact, why it was "always right"'. Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva*, 255.

The general will plays a central role in Rousseau's political philosophy. Later we will see how it is used to resolve the problems Rousseau perceived in Geneva. The social contract which forms the ideal state stipulates that 'each of us places his person and all his power in common *under the supreme direction of the general will*' (I.6, my emphasis). The general will is therefore the guiding principle of the state. It is used to guide decision-making in the sovereign assembly (usually just called the Sovereign);[90] when the Sovereign votes on a law, they vote on whether or not it reflects the general will:

> When a law is proposed in the People's assembly, what is asked of the members is not precisely whether they approve the proposal or reject it, but whether it is or is not in conformity with the general will which is their own. In giving his suffrage, each expresses his opinion on this, and from the reckoning of the votes the declaration of the general will is drawn. So when the opposite opinion to mine prevails, that proves nothing other than that I was mistaken, and that what I considered to be the general will was not (IV.2)

When the Sovereign votes, Rousseau requires that the people are 'properly informed' and hold 'no communication with one another' (II.3). Each citizen must make up his own mind on the issue at hand, to prevent factions arising, what Rousseau calls 'partial associations [which] are formed at the expense of the greater one' (II.3). When a vote is taken in this way, 'the large number of small differences would always result in the general will and the deliberation would always be good' (II.3). As a measure of the state's health, Rousseau thinks that the more opinions approach unanimity, the more the general will is dominant. Long debates and dissension 'signal the ascendant of particular interests and the decline of the State' (IV.1). The general will is determined by each citizen putting aside, as much as possible, their own private interests and voting on what is in the common interest.

---

[90] The Sovereign is the legislature of Rousseau's ideal state; he describes it as 'a corporate and collective body composed of as many members as the assembly has votes' (I.6), but he does not state explicitly that every single adult person in the state will be a member of the Sovereign. Williams notes that we can be confident that women, for example, would not be included: for Williams, the way Rousseau uses language is significant. He consistently uses male pronouns to describe citizens, and Williams argues that this 'at least occasionally' reflects Rousseau's views on citizenship. Indeed, Rousseau does not talk about women in the language of rights, but he speaks of 'the condition of women'. It is worth noting that citizenship is not something Rousseau spends a lot of time on in the *Social Contract*; for him citizenship is not a matter of juridical principles, but a way of living. For our purposes, we will indulge Rousseau's eighteenth-century blind spot and assume that citizenship is conferred on the basis of universal (male) suffrage. Williams, *Rousseau's Social Contract: An Introduction*, 278; Catherine Larrère, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau on Woman and Citizenship," *History of European Ideas* 37, no. 2 (2011): 218, 22.

2.2.2 The Republic of Geneva

The next stage of our discussion is to get familiar with how Rousseau's Geneva actually functioned, and the crises of the eighteenth century. This will allow us to describe the problem which Rousseau addresses in the *Social Contract*. Geneva in the mid-eighteenth century was a city-state of about 25,000 people. It was possible to walk across the city in fifteen minutes, and the whole territory of the independent republic was only seventy square miles.[91] The men of Geneva were divided into five different orders, each subject to different taxes and different levels of taxation.[92] The important divide is between citizens and bourgeois on the one hand, and subjects (*sujets*), inhabitants (*habitants*), and natives (*natifs*) on the other. Citizens and bourgeois had political rights; *natifs*, *habitants*, and *sujets* did not, though they made up about three-quarters of the population.[93] Bourgeois had purchased the right to vote in the General Council; their children were Citizens.[94] Only Citizens were eligible for high office.[95] Rousseau himself was a Citizen; he signed the title page of the *Social Contract* as 'J.J. Rousseau, Citizen of Geneva'. Throughout this section I refer to "bourgeoisie", meaning both citizens and bourgeois.

Rousseau's ideal state reflects the institutional structure of his native city, which was governed by a series of councils. The General Council was open to all men of the bourgeoisie over the age of twenty-five—about 1,500 in all. They met to enact legislation, elect certain officials, and vote on taxation when necessary.[96] This is much closer to direct democracy, as practised in Plato's Athens, and greatly removed from the parliamentary democracy which is more familiar today. It is worth noting that the Genevan concept of democracy is different to our concept of it today. The allegedly democratic assembly, the General Council, consisted of about 1,500 men out of a population of 25,000—six percent. There was no question of the Council being somehow representative; they viewed themselves as the sovereign people assembled. This kind of democracy was in full swing in Plato's Athens, as we will see in the next chapter. Above the General Council was the Council of Two Hundred, who heard appeals, granted pardons, and oversaw the coinage.[97] The Small Council, of twenty-five,

---

[91] Palmer, *Democratic Revolution*, 83.
[92] Whatmore, *Against War and Empire*, 26.
[93] Palmer, *Democratic Revolution*, 96.
[94] Pamela A. Mason, "The Genevan Republican Background to Rousseau's *Social Contract*," *History of Political Thought* 14, no. 4 (1993): 554.
[95] Kirk, "Genevan Republicanism," 273.
[96] Ibid., 274.
[97] Ibid.

exercised most of the tasks of government, and chose the members of the Two Hundred—who in turn elected the members of the Small Council.[98] Many members of the Two Hundred and the Small Council came from a small group of influential families.[99] In addition to these councils, there were four magistrates called syndics, who were elected by the General Council.[100] Though the General Council was at least nominally sovereign, by the end of the seventeenth century it had ceased to exercise that sovereignty in any meaningful way.[101] The Two Hundred and the Small Council were Geneva's ruling aristocracy.[102] Thus, there was a tension between the Genevan mythos of freedom, equality, and democracy on the one hand, and the political reality of a plutocratic oligarchy on the other.[103] This tension is significant, because it would play an important role in the crises of the eighteenth century, and it is this tension that Rousseau seeks to resolve.

There were, broadly speaking, two opposing narratives about Geneva's sovereignty and the role of the General Council. One narrative held that sovereignty did not lie exclusively with the General Council, but was shared between it and the smaller councils.[104] Those who believed this narrative pointed to a number of sixteenth-century edicts, in which the smaller councils were empowered to perform many of the tasks—mentioned above—which had formerly been the province of the General Council. The opposing narrative, that sovereignty belonged to the General Council alone, objected that those edicts were invalid because they contradicted *Les franchises*, the 'Genevan magna carta'.[105] This confirmed in perpetuity the liberties and rights of the citizens, their power to elect syndics to act as judges in criminal matters, and the right of the citizens to consent to taxation.

For much of the eighteenth century, Geneva was gripped by what Pamela A. Mason calls a 'crisis of republican identity'.[106] It was a conflict not just about the form of government—oligarchy versus democracy—but about what it meant to be Genevan.[107] The fundamental

---

[98] Williams, *Rousseau's Social Contract: An Introduction*, 4-5. There was also a Council of Sixty, but it was unimportant. Palmer, *Democratic Revolution*, 96.
[99] Palmer, *Democratic Revolution*, 88-89.
[100] Mason, "Background," 551.
[101] Kirk, "Genevan Republicanism," 274.
[102] Palmer, *Democratic Revolution*, 96.
[103] Christopher Bertram, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Rousseau and the Social Contract* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 8.
[104] Whatmore, *Against War and Empire*, 30.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Mason, "Background," 548.
[107] Bertram, *Rousseau and the Social Contract*, 8.

issue in eighteenth-century Genevan politics was the meaning of sovereignty, and how it ought to be expressed in a state where the "sovereignty of the people" had been an article of civic faith since the sixteenth century.[108]

Mason points to seven significant episodes between 1707 and 1798, when Genevan identity as such ceased to exist as the city-state was annexed by France. Of most interest to us are the disturbances of the 1730s. The theme is very much one of escalation. The issue at hand was whether or not taxes levied by the smaller councils were legitimate. In March 1734, two formal "representations", formal written complaints, were made. The representations asked the smaller councils to 'reflect' on the taxes which they had imposed without the consent of the General Council, and requested that the General Council be summoned to address the issues.[109] The ruling group continued to support the second narrative we discussed above. Indeed, the argument seems to be that while the people of Geneva (i.e. the General Council) had once been sovereign, in the sixteenth century they had chosen to put themselves under a form of government (i.e. the smaller councils). That authority, once delegated, could not be unilaterally withdrawn.[110] By the end of June 1734, the bourgeoisie who had submitted the representations ran out of patience, and used the city's militia—which was organised by the bourgeoisie, not directed by the government—to take over the city. The government backed down, and declared that a General Council would be called for 8 July. Thus peace was assured, for the short term at least. In August 1737 significant unrest broke out again, as armed conflict between the government and bourgeoisie looked more and more likely. The bourgeois militias again took over the city, this time with a dozen killed and about the same number wounded. The political struggle until that point had been bloodless.[111] This prompted international intervention: France, along with Geneva's Swiss allies Berne and Zürich, imposed a compromise called the *Réglement* or *Médiation*,[112] which was finalised the following year. The Mediation was a masterly compromise, and codified the General Council's powers over war and peace, taxation, the city's fortifications, new laws, state debt, and the election of state officers.[113] The smaller councils were to be responsible for the day-to-day running of the government. The Mediation was effectively Geneva's constitution.[114]

---

[108] Mason, "Background," 549.
[109] Kirk, "Genevan Republicanism," 282.
[110] Ibid., 284.
[111] Ibid., 286.
[112] Whatmore, *Against War and Empire*, 40.
[113] Kirk, "Genevan Republicanism," 286.
[114] Palmer, *Democratic Revolution*, 96.

As a final point, it is worth mentioning the reaction to Rousseau's *Social Contract* and *Emile*, both published in 1762. Earlier, we noted that both books were burned in Geneva. This sparked another conflict between the ruling councils and the bourgeoisie. The conflict was whether the proceedings against Rousseau had been constitutional, whether seizure of copies of *Emile* had been consistent with booksellers' rights, whether citizens had a right to know what judgements were made in their name, and so on.[115] The controversy—which quickly became part of the longer ongoing debate about the nature and location of sovereignty— lasted, in the form of a pamphlet war and periodic political wrangling, until 1768.[116]

The tension in Geneva in the eighteenth century was between the democratic origin and mythos of the city and their oligarchical reality. On the one hand the General Council was nominally sovereign, and on the other they had ceased to exercise that sovereignty in any meaningful way. The periodic crises during the eighteenth century were attempts by disenfranchised citizens to restore the proper order of things, based on the narrative that the people of Geneva—that is, the General Council—should continue to exercise the sovereignty which had been usurped by the smaller councils. The opposing narrative was that the sovereignty delegated to the smaller councils could not now be withdrawn. Rousseau resolves this tension in the *Social Contract*, siding decisively with the General Council.

2.2.3 Rousseau's Genevan Solutions

Generations of historians have noticed that the *Social Contract* is directed towards Rousseau's Geneva, part of a conversation aiming to return the state to its democratic foundations.[117] Indeed, this was recognised at the time: Rousseau's fellow Genevans understood the *Social Contract* as a critique of Genevan politics;[118] It was clear to all, Rosenblatt notes, that it 'furnished a philosophical basis for the bourgeoisie's political demands'.[119] The Small Council declared that the *Social Contract* contained 'principles

---

[115] Kirk, "Genevan Republicanism," 293.
[116] Major events in this pamphlet war include the publication of Jean-Robert Trochin's *Letters Written from the Country*, published in 1763, and Rousseau's response, *Letters Written from the Mountain*¸ published 1764. Kirk gives an interesting account of events, ibid., 293-99.
[117] Whatmore, *Against War and Empire*, 56.
[118] Kirk, "Genevan Republicanism," 290.
[119] Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva*, 269.

destructive to all governments, and of ours in particular'.[120] Spector acknowledges that the local context is important to understanding some of the *Social Contract*'s basic ideas, but claims that there is still some controversy around this.[121] In this section we will show how Rousseau's ideal state solves the problems of the 1730s in particular. Rousseau himself acknowledged that the *Social Contract* has a Genevan application. In the *Letters Written from the Mountains*, written two years after the *Social Contract* was published, he wrote that 'I took your [Geneva's] Constitution, which I found noble, as a model for political institutions. And in proposing you as an example to Europe, far from seeking to destroy you, I was setting forth the means to preserve you'.[122] This does not imply, though, that the present Geneva of the mid-eighteenth century was the ideal, nor does it imply that the *Social Contract* only fits in this context.[123] As we noted earlier, Rousseau is interested in what makes a state legitimate, and he explores this question in the *Social Contract*. Legitimacy is important because we are obliged to obey only legitimate powers, as opposed to being forced to obey a stronger power (I.3).[124] Rousseau is attempting to determine how a rational state ought to be constructed. The application to Geneva, then, will be in showing how the actual state has deviated from the rational programme. There are two areas to explore: Rousseau's structure of the government, and the way he uses the General Will.

The foundational concept for Rousseau's ideal state, which informs the way he structures it, is that legitimate authority can only be founded on convention. We have seen already that Rousseau dismisses force as a legitimate kind of authority, similarly he argues that there is no kind of natural authority (I.2). The convention which legitimises the state is, at its core, an agreement made by each member of civil society to place themselves under the supreme direction of the general will (I.6). This agreement produces the Sovereign, the legislative power of the state. The Sovereign cannot legislate on particular matters; their decisions must be general in application, if the general will is to be truly general, it 'must be so in its object as well as in its essence . . . it loses its natural rightness when it tends towards some individual, determinate object' (II.4). The law, for Rousseau, 'considers subjects in a body

---

[120] Ibid, 270.

[121] Spector, *Rousseau*, 63. Spector does not go into detail about what exactly is controversial, or who is engaging in the conversation.

[122] Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 181.

[123] Spector, *Rousseau*, 63.

[124] To illustrate the difference, imagine you are robbed in an alley by a person armed with a gun. You are forced to hand over your wallet, but you are in no way *obliged* to do so. We might compare that with paying tax, which we are obliged to do (as well as forced, on occasion).

and actions as abstract, never a man as an individual or a particular action' (II.5). While the Sovereign can, for example, pass a law which decides that there will be different classes of citizen, or there will be certain privileges, it cannot grant those privileges to any individual by name.[125] In order to apply the law to particular matters and persons, the Sovereign delegates executive authority to the Government, which Rousseau calls the Prince (III.1). The Prince is 'an intermediary body established between the subjects and the Sovereign for their mutual correspondence, charged with the execution of laws and with the maintenance of liberty, both civil and political' (III.1). The Sovereign and the subjects are the same people at different times; when the people are legislating, they form the Sovereign, and at all other times they are subjects, subject to the law.[126] The authority delegated to the Prince by the Sovereign is 'nothing whatsoever but a commission . . . a power that it [the Sovereign] can limit, modify and take back when it likes, the alienation of such a right being incompatible with the nature of the social body and contrary to the purpose of association' (III.1). It may not be apparent at this stage why the Sovereign may wish to revoke the authority it delegates, but this will become clearer in due course. The important point here is that the Prince is the mechanism which applies the Sovereign's necessarily general resolutions to particular situations and individuals.

The way Rousseau structures the government in his ideal state resolves the tension between the oligarchical reality and democratic national myth of Geneva. We saw above that there were two narratives about sovereignty in Geneva during the eighteenth century, one which held that the General Council was sovereign, and one which held that while the General Council had *been* sovereign in the past, it had delegated its sovereign authority to the smaller councils, and that delegation could not be simply rescinded. Rousseau takes the wind out of this second narrative's sails, arguing that for a state to be legitimate, the Sovereign—in Geneva, the General Council—must be recognised as the root of authority, and while it delegates executive power to the government, this power can be revoked at the Sovereign's discretion. This distinction between the Sovereign and the Prince—between state and government—was known to the Genevans of Rousseau's day as well. To them, state meant

---

[125] This is now acknowledged as a general feature of law, perhaps most famously associated with the nineteenth-century legal positivist John Austin, who distinguishes between laws, or rules, and what he calls '*occasional* or *particular* commands'. John Austin, *The Province of Jurisprudence Determined* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 25. Austin's emphasis.

[126] A useful analogy might be with Parliament. When New Zealand's Parliament is sitting, it is often called the House (of Representatives), but the House is only in session—only in existence—when Parliament is sitting, or "active" in Rousseau's terms.

the General Council, the sovereign people in assembly. Government was the set of institutions tasked with furthering the common good.[127] Indeed, the distinction between sovereignty and government was one of the things Rousseau found valuable about Geneva's historic constitution.[128] Geneva was in crisis because those in the smaller councils were threatening to disrupt the traditional division of power between the state and the government by challenging the General Council's sovereignty.[129] Rousseau's solution is to try to prove that popular sovereignty is the only legitimate form of civil society, and that government—executive power—is delegated by the sovereign assembly. Executive authority in the ideal state is 'nothing whatsoever but a commission' (III.1); government officials are servants of the Sovereign and exercise power in their name.

The way Rousseau uses the general will also helps to bolster the case for the sovereignty of the General Council in Geneva; by showing why sovereignty cannot be delegated, it shows why sovereignty is inalienable. As we saw, the general will is the common will of all the citizens as it seeks the common interest. But it is important to remember that Rousseau says that 'so long as several men together *consider themselves a single body*, they have but a single will, which is directed towards their common preservation and general welfare' (IV.1, my emphasis). Each member of the Prince, if there is more than one, has three wills: their own individual will; a part of the common will of the Prince, which Rousseau calls a 'corporate will'; and a part of the general will of the people as a whole (III.2). The Prince's corporate will is a sub-set of the general will; it is the "general will" of the several individuals who make up the Government. Over time, Rousseau argues, the Prince will come to take its corporate will for the general will. When this happens, the State is dissolved, 'and another is formed within it, composed only of the members of the Government, which to the rest of the People is no longer anything but its master and tyrant . . . [who they] are forced—albeit not obliged—to obey' (III.10). This is what Rousseau means when he says that the ideal state 'bears within itself the causes of its destruction'. For, he notes, 'if Sparta and Rome perished, what State can hope to last for ever?' (III.11). As Christopher Kelly puts it, the very need for a government creates the conditions under which that government will turn tyrannical.[130] One

---

[127] Mason, "Background," 551.
[128] Whatmore, *Against War and Empire*, 66.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Christopher Kelly, "Sovereign Versus Government: Rousseau's Republicanism," *Acta Politilogica* 10, no. 2 (2018): 21.

key way to resist the decline and fall of the social contract is to avoid representative government. It is worth quoting Rousseau at length here:

> Sovereignty cannot be represented, for the same reason that it cannot be alienated. It consists essentially in the general will, and will cannot be represented . . . hence, the deputies of the people are not and cannot be its representatives; they are merely its agents, who cannot conclude anything definitely. Any law that the People has not ratified in person is null; it is no law at all (III.15).

Rousseau refers to England: 'the English people thinks it is free, but it is quite mistaken: it is free only during the election of members of Parliament; as soon as these are elected, it is enslaved, it is nothing' (III.15). The election of the four Syndics was one of the few tasks remaining to the General Council in the eighteenth century; Rousseau does not want Geneva to be enslaved, as he thinks England is. The key point here is that, in the ideal state, the Sovereign must meet and follow the general will; in Geneva the General Council must be allowed to meet and perform what Rousseau thinks is its proper function. This also clarifies why Rousseau thinks the authority which the Sovereign delegates to the Prince can be revoked at will: sovereignty cannot be represented, and revoking the Prince's authority may be a way to resist the decay of the State.

The local problem which the ideal state in the *Social Contract* solves is the tension between Geneva's legitimating myth as a democracy, and its actual experience as an oligarchy. The ideal state resolves this tension through an examination of what it means for a state to be legitimate; the obvious conclusion is that the actual arrangement of power in Geneva is not legitimate. The core of Rousseau's solution is that political power can only be based on convention, with a distinction between the state and the government—the Sovereign and the Prince, in Rousseau's terms. The government is tasked with executing the law; authority is delegated to it by the Sovereign. There is only a moral obligation to obey the government because its authority is bestowed upon it by the Sovereign, in accordance with the General Will. If the government usurps the sovereign power, we can say that people are forced to obey, but they are not obliged.

The structure of Rousseau's ideal state can seem strange at first, though it recalls the structure of the Roman republic. Though we have not discussed it here, Rousseau prescribes several Roman offices for his ideal state, including censors and tribunes. However, the institutions of Rousseau's ideal state seem ill-suited to a modern state. A universal legislature which

delegates executive authority is unusual, and seems unworkable, especially in large states. It is difficult to imagine how the ideal state could work with a large population, as Rousseau himself recognises: 'I do not see how it is henceforth possible for the Sovereign to preserve among us the exercise of its rights, if the City be not very small' (III.15). If we compare Rousseau's ideal state with France or England, which had much larger populations and different institutions, it is difficult to imagine how the ideal state could possibly function.[131] However, once we compare the ideal state with the reality of Rousseau's Geneva, the strangeness evaporates. The strangeness of Rousseau's ideal state stems from trying to imagine its application to existing states. Once we recognise that it applies to Geneva, but not necessarily elsewhere, the imaginative process becomes much easier. Rousseau's ideal state is difficult to envisage in the context of a large nation like France or England, but in the Genevan context it works well. The institutions of the ideal state are similar to the already-existing institutions in Geneva, where France and England—one an absolute monarchy, the other a constitutional monarchy—have radically different institutions and political cultures.

2.3 Conclusion

We have used this chapter to explore two base cases, two accounts of the ideal state whose local application is reasonably well understood. This allows us to see the process through which an ideal state can be said to solve a local problem. The ideal state is constructed in such a way that the local problem becomes impossible. More uses *Utopia* to solve the problem of private property, where a pursuit of personal profit forces others into poverty. There is no private property in Utopia, and nothing to profit from. More's society is designed to put the community's needs at the centre of social life, so that the common good becomes identified with each individual's good. We should acknowledge that at least some of Utopia's apparently spartan features reflect More's personal preferences; he was a man of simple tastes who enjoyed intellectual pursuits. Rousseau constructs a quasi-scientific account of the "real" or "true" nature of politics. The Geneva of his day was based on a civic mythology of democracy and freedom, which made a strong contrast with the oligarchical reality. By working through the general will and the social contract which establishes a legitimate state,

---

[131] England 5.8 million, France 24.5 million in 1750. Recall that the population of Rousseau's Geneva was 25,000. Andrew Hinde, *England's Population: A History since the Domesday Survey* (London: Arnold, 2003), 183.

Rousseau supports the narrative that the General Council is always sovereign: sovereignty cannot be permanently delegated.

I noted that Rousseau's model of the ideal state has a quasi-scientific form. We will see this theme repeated when we look at Hobbes and Marx and Engels, in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. Before we get to them, though, we return to Plato's *Republic* to investigate how his ideal state solves major issues in the Athens of his day.

3. Platonic *Republic* and Athenian Democracy

In Chapter 1, we discussed *Republic* in some detail without saying much about the specifics of Plato's ideal city; the focus then was on the general features of the ideal state. This chapter will explore those specifics. In seeking to define justice and the ideally just state in *Republic*, Plato produces a model of the ideal state which acts as a general solution: the ideal state he describes is supposed to be the best possible for all peoples in all times and places. However, we are better to read his ideal state as emerging from a particular solution to problems in the Athenian democracy than taking Plato at his word as to how he envisions his project. Debra Nails argues that many of Plato's proposals are usefully understood as 'counterweights' to the actual practice of Athenian democracy.[1] The problems in the Athenian polity which motivate Plato's ideal state are nicely illustrated by the democratic conduct of the Peloponnesian War, which ran on and off for twenty-seven years between 431 and 404 BC.[2] It is during that conflict, particularly in episodes towards the end of the war, that the failings of the Athenian government are made most plain, and the way Plato proposes to solve the problems he identifies is most clear. It is also possible, incidentally, that Plato himself could recall some of these events; he was in his mid-twenties when the war ended in 404.[3]

To a certain extent, our conclusions about what Plato is trying to do in *Republic* will be somewhat speculative. This is partly due to the gulf of time between Plato's day and our own—a gulf which is much wider than with our other authors.[4] The main difficulty, though, is the lack of firm evidence. For instance, we do not know precisely when Plato wrote *Republic*. C.D.C. Reeve suggests a date of around 380, when Plato would have been in his late forties,[5] and W.K.C. Guthrie indicates a prevailing view of 374 as a completion date.[6] However, there is evidence that a "proto-*Republic*", which comprised most of Books II-V of the full text, was published before 391, when Aristophanes parodied its central elements in

---

[1] Nails, "Athenian Context," 5.

[2] Unless noted otherwise, all dates given in this chapter are BC. Dates are often given as, for example, 407/6. The Athenian year started at midsummer, and we are often uncertain about when exactly in a year a given event occurred; hence 407/6 indicates a solar year beginning in mid-407 BC. See J.W. Roberts, *City of Sokrates: An Introduction to Classical Athens*, Second ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 2; and Debra Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), xlii.

[3] As well as this, Socrates himself served as a soldier in the Peloponnesian War. He refers to this in the *Apology*, mentioning the battles of Potidaea (432), Amphipolis (422), and Delium (424) (*Apology*, 28e).

[4] For example, Thomas More was born in AD 1478, some five-and-a-half centuries ago. Plato was born in 428 BC, nineteen centuries before More.

[5] Plato, *Plato: Republic*, ed. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), ix.

[6] Guthrie, *History*, 437.

his play *Ecclesiazusae* (*Assemblywomen*).[7] This would have been when Plato was in his mid-thirties. However, it is possible that Plato and Aristophanes each drew on a common, unknown work.[8] The uncertainty around the date of composition makes it difficult, if not impossible, to know if Plato refers to *Republic* in any other works. This type of cross-referencing can be extremely useful in determining how a thinker's ideas have developed over time. Because we cannot know exactly when *Republic* was written, the task of comparing the ideal state with the local historical context is made more difficult.

Plato conceives of his project in *Republic* as an essentially descriptive one. As we saw in Chapter 1, Socrates and his interlocutors are trying to work out 'what justice and injustice are and what power each itself has when it's by itself in the soul' (*Republic* II.358b); they are seeking to characterise a just individual. Describing an ideally just city will make the nature of justice easier to identify, as it is larger in the city than in the individual—this is the letters analogy. The dialogue form makes Plato's expectations quite tricky to establish, however. As with More, there is a "fourth wall" between the speakers and the reader. Plato does not address his reader directly, as some other authors do, in order to make clear what he takes himself to be doing, and to what purpose. There are some clues which suggest what Plato's expectations are for *Republic*, though these are by no means definitive. Being able to define justice is its own reward, for justice is, according to Socrates, 'among the finest goods . . . both because of itself and because of what comes from it' (II.358a). For the city and the individual, the lesson is a straightforward one: if we wish to 'achieve the height of good government' (VIII.543a), then all we need do is follow Plato's prescriptions. He thinks that his ideal state is generally applicable; it can be achieved by any society, whether it is 'past, present, or future' (VI.499d). However, Plato has made a mistake in the way he thinks about his project. Rather than a disinterested inquiry into the nature of justice, which can provide a general model of the ideal state, Plato's ideal state in *Republic* solves local problems in fifth-century Athens and creates a generally applicable model from this basis. We will explore the kinds of problems which Plato finds with the Athenian polity, and how they are to be solved in the ideal state.

---

[7] Debra Nails, "The Life of Plato of Athens," in *A Companion to Plato*, ed. Hugh H. Benson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 6. We mentioned *Ecclesiazusae* in Chapter 1, when talking about gender equality in Plato's ideal state.

[8] Malcolm Schofield, *Plato: Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 229.

Right from the outset, we are beset by difficulties when it comes to Plato's ideal city. It has been both 'denounced as a piece of ruthless totalitarianism and admired as an early exercise in feminism. . . . it must be admitted that it is in many respects in conflict with the most basic human rights, devoid of privacy and full of deceit'.[9] Julia Annas warns that it would be wrong to label Plato a 'monstrous totalitarian' or an apologist for tyranny too quickly; his ideas are 'more interesting than that'.[10] To us, in the twenty-first century AD, many of the institutions Plato prescribes seem outlandish and psychologically implausible. We might wonder if Plato actually expects people in his ideal state to believe the things he says they ought to believe, or whether he is engaged in a hyperbolic project intended to provoke discussion and reflection among his Athenian contemporaries. Scholars have been divided on this issue. Allan Bloom, for instance, finds Book V of *Republic*—which contains the most controversial elements of the ideal city—'preposterous', and argues that Plato cannot have intended it to be taken seriously.[11] Bloom's view seems to be in the minority, however, as most scholars conclude that, strange though it seems to us, Plato does intend the proposals in *Republic* to be taken seriously.

That Plato identifies problems in the Athens of his day might be generally agreed upon; he has long been acknowledged as a critic of Athenian democracy. Though his aim in *Republic* is to find and describe justice in general terms,[12] Athenian democracy was 'the port from which he set sail', and this is a distinctive feature of his work. He is perhaps most explicit in his criticism in *Protagoras* and *Laws*, but a sceptical attitude towards democracy permeates all of Plato's work.[13] In *Laws*, for instance, the Athenian remarks that democracy has been taken 'to extreme lengths' by Athens (*Laws* III.693d). It has been argued that Plato's ideal city is intended to prevent the kinds of conflicts which took place in the Assembly and law courts of Athens.[14] On this account, Plato sees politics not as the art of conflict resolution, but as the art of making conflict impossible.[15] Political conflict in Athens led, at least in part, to the death of Socrates in 399. On this view, Plato attacked Athenian democracy because he

---

[9] Kenny, *New History*, 52.

[10] Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 173.

[11] Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, 380.

[12] Strictly speaking, the ideal city is intended to *realise* justice, rather than merely locate it. However, as I noted in Chapter 1, Socrates frames the project as an essentially descriptive one, and I am following his lead here.

[13] Daniela Cammack, "Plato and Athenian Justice," *History of Political Thought* 36, no. 4 (2015): 611.

[14] Luc Brisson, "Plato's View on Greek Government," in *A Companion to Ancient Greek Government*, ed. Hans Beck (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 94.

[15] Ibid., 103. In the next chapter, we will see that Hobbes has a similar idea of politics.

felt it was responsible for Socrates' death.[16] It seems to me that Plato's focus is not only on Socrates; as I have said above the ideal state proposes solutions to the problematic nature of Athenian democracy itself. The death of Socrates, I argue, is a symptom of the underlying political problem. Plato is not merely a critic; he offers solutions to the problems he identifies.

Before we can compare Athens with Kallipolis,[17] we need to understand how Kallipolis is structured, then we can deal with Athens as context dictates. The citizenry of the ideal city is divided into two classes on the basis of ability, which is determined through an extensive education and testing programme. This division is in keeping with the principle of specialisation; we are all naturally suited to a particular occupation, and 'more plentiful and better-quality goods are more easily produced if each person does one thing for which he is naturally suited, does it at the right time, and is released from having to do any of the others' (II.370c). The two classes are commonly named the money-makers or producers on the one hand and the guardians on the other; the productive and military classes respectively. From the ranks of the guardians the city's rulers are chosen. Plato is not consistent in how he refers to this uppermost, third, class. Once he introduces the rulers he assigns them the name guardians—guardians proper, as it were—and sometimes refers to the rest of the guardian class as auxiliaries. In this chapter I refer to auxiliaries on the one hand and rulers on the other; by guardians I mean the two groups taken together. The 'politically crucial' divide is between the guardians and the producers.[18] Plato gives us very little information about the lives of the producers; his focus is on the guardians. This has led some commentators to infer that Plato is assuming the producers' lives will be much the same as the lives of ordinary Greeks of his day.[19]

---

[16] Ibid., 93.

[17] The names Athens and Attica (as well as their adjectival forms Athenian and Attican) are often used more or less interchangeably in discussions of this period. To the Athenians it was *all* Attica but, following Nails, I find it useful to distinguish the city of Athens from the rural Attica. As a modern example we might think of the distinction between New York City and New York State: while it is all in New York, it can be useful to distinguish between the city and the rest of the state. Attica was one of the largest city-states in Greece, with an area of about 1000 square miles, about the same size as modern Luxembourg. Plato's ideal city is often given the name Kallipolis (or Callipolis), meaning "fine (or beautiful) city". Socrates gives it this name at VII.527c. Thus, we have Athens or Attica on the one hand, and Kallipolis on the other. Nails, "Athenian Context," 6, n. 19; George Klosko, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory*, Second ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5.

[18] Annas, *Introduction*, 172.

[19] Ibid., 171.

The class system is entrenched in Kallipolis by the Noble Lie, the charter myth of the city.[20] We will talk much more about the Noble Lie and its utility below, when we consider social structures. Guardians—both men and women—are required to live communally and are forbidden to own private property. Perhaps most famously, or notoriously, guardian women and children are to be held in common, and guardian children will not know who their parents are. This, also, is discussed in more detail below.

We begin our analysis of the local problems and Plato's solutions to them by comparing and contrasting the political structures of Athens and Kallipolis. Throughout this chapter I will illustrate these problems and solutions with examples from the Peloponnesian War (431-404); our first example is the Sicilian Expedition of 416/15 and the flight of Alcibiades. We then turn to consider another contrast between Athens and Kallipolis, in terms of their respective social structures. This is illustrated—at least in part—by the political aftermath of the battle of Arginusae in 406. Then we turn to the very end of the Peloponnesian War, to talk about the reign of the Thirty Tyrants and the relationship between democracy and tyranny. Finally, we discuss the trial and execution of Socrates in 399. I have already indicated that there is much uncertainty surrounding Plato and his context. I do not try to argue that Plato is reacting and responding to the *exact* events I describe here.[21] The events I have chosen illustrate what is wrong, on Plato's account, with Athenian democracy, and how his ideal state solves those problems. In discussing how Kallipolis would avoid the fiasco associated with, for instance, the Sicilian Expedition, one obvious objection is that Kallipolis would almost certainly not be fighting the Peloponnesian War at all; Plato describes the city as a small, self-reliant *polis*, not an imperial power like Athens was. The purpose, however, is not to argue that Kallipolis would have prosecuted the war more successfully than Athens did, but to show that the ideal city would have avoided the (often self-inflicted) disastrous consequences of democratic handling of the war; the structure of decision-making in Kallipolis would prevent imprudent wars, and would avoid what Winston Churchill calls the 'impotence and fatuity of waging war by committee'.[22]

---

[20] Malcolm Schofield, "The Noble Lie," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, ed. G.R.F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 138.

[21] Not least because Plato would have been around 13 years old when the Sicilian Expedition sailed, about 18 at the time of the battle of Arginusae, and just hitting 20 when the democracy fell to the Thirty Tyrants. George Klosko notes that Plato's early years were filled with political turmoil as he saw Athens go from political supremacy to near destruction. Klosko, *Development*, 1.

[22] Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume I: The Gathering Storm* (London: Cassell, 1948), 458.

3.1 Political Structures: Philosopher-Kings

As we explore the historical context of Plato's Athens, we should bear in mind that many of Plato's proposals would seem less outlandish to his contemporaries than they do to us.[23] Indeed, Athenian democracy itself is quite strange by modern standards. Having a good understanding of how Athenian democracy worked will give us an understanding of how Plato reacted and responded to it, and how his ideal state solves particular problems within the Athenian context. We start with the key political institution: the Assembly (*ecclēsia*). The Assembly was the policy-making body of Attica. In principle, it consisted of all male citizens over the age of 20; at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War this was around 45,000 men.[24] In practice, an attendance of around 6000 could be expected to debate big issues,[25] though there is some reason to think that regular attendance was lower, between 4,500 and 5,000— still an extraordinary degree of participation in decision-making.[26] For those close to and living in the city itself, those involved in agriculture were more likely to have the time to attend the Assembly than shopkeepers or craftsmen. Further out from the city walls, attendance became more limited.[27] Towards the end of the fifth century the Assembly met about forty times a year; big issues might take two days to resolve.[28] The Assembly's agenda was drawn up by the Council (*boulē*),[29] made up of 500 citizens over the age of thirty, fifty

---

[23] Bertrand Russell points out that, for instance, some of the reforms Plato advocates were actually instituted at Sparta. Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, New ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 120. As a more general point, this is not to say that Plato's contemporaries did not criticise his proposals; they did, and most severely. Aristotle, for instance, devotes the first five chapters of Book II of *Politics* to rebutting Plato's description of the guardians' living arrangements (which we discuss later). However, the point is that Aristotle assumes that the proposals Plato makes are to be taken seriously. Earlier, we saw that Bloom finds the guardians' living arrangements so bizarre that he concludes Plato could not have been serious. Aristotle, on the other hand, thinks Plato's argument is unsuccessful, but he does not reject them as satirical.

[24] John Thorley, *Athenian Democracy*, Second ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 32. The total population of Attica at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War was around 300,000.

[25] Roberts, *City of Sokrates*, 51.

[26] Christopher Carey, *Democracy in Classical Athens*, Second ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 66. The lower figure, 4,500 represents about 10% of those eligible to attend, and about 1.3% of the total population. That is an absurdly large figure by modern standards. The largest (lower house or unicameral) legislature in the world, in our own day, is China's National People's Congress, which has 2,975 members. Second and third place go to North Korea (687 members), and the UK House of Commons (650 MPs). The House of Commons represents just over one thousandth of one percent of the UK's voting population (just under 50 million people). IPU Parline. "Compare Data on Parliaments," accessed September 2020, https://data.ipu.org/compare?field=chamber%3A%3Afield_current_members_number&structure=any__lower_chamber#map; Office for National Statistics. "Electoral Statistics, UK: December 2020," accessed May 2021, https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/elections/electoralregistration/bulletins/electoralstatisticsforuk/december2020.

[27] Carey, *Democracy*, 68. This is perhaps unsurprising, as a citizen living near Attica's borders would need three days to make the sixty-mile round trip to attend a session of the Assembly.

[28] Roberts, *City of Sokrates*, 51.

[29] Ibid., 50.

from each of the ten tribes of the region.[30] The Council's presiding committee, the *prytaneis*, rotated among the tribes; their main task was to set the agenda for the Council,[31] they also chaired sessions of the Assembly.

The Athenian government was, for the most part, a government of amateurs, and this was a deliberate feature of the system. Most public officers were appointed by sortition, or lot, for a one-year term; it was not possible to hold the same office twice.[32] Administrative tasks were kept so simple that any citizen could perform them competently.[33] This made developing any meaningful expertise impossible. The amateur nature of Athenian politics is an important aspect of the local problem which Plato solves.

Some public offices were filled by election rather than sortition. Most important for us were the generals, ten of whom were elected annually.[34] Though the generals had control over military strategy in the field, the Assembly decided whether to go to war, whether to stay at war, what objectives were to be pursued, with what forces and under what commanders.[35] The generals, then, needed to be persuasive public speakers as well as capable soldiers. In meetings of the Assembly, the ability to persuade was vital, to get oneself elected, or to get a bill adopted, which might commit the city to a major war.[36] As a result, rhetoric tended to be success-directed, rather than truth directed;[37] a kind of institutionalised sophistry. One reason for this is that Athens had become literate only comparatively recently, and the literacy in Athens was a 'craft-literacy', where scribes are hired to write text for others.[38] In an oral—or mostly oral—culture, truth is shaped by the present more than the often unknowable past.[39] There were a number of persuasive tools on which speakers could draw. Aristotle famously describes three kinds of persuasion: 'the first kind depends upon the personal character of the

---

[30] Thorley, *Athenian Democracy*, 28.
[31] Roberts, *City of Sokrates*, 57.
[32] Ibid., 52.
[33] Nails, "Athenian Context," 15.
[34] Roberts, *City of Sokrates*, 53-54.
[35] Ibid., 55.
[36] Brisson, "Plato's View," 94.
[37] Tim Dare and Justine Kingsbury provide a useful example of a success-directed activity in a modern context: a debate. We are not so interested in whether one side or another got closer to the truth, rather the outcome of a debate is "who won?" This was vividly illustrated by the reaction to the leaders' debates between Jacinda Ardern and Judith Collins in September-October 2020, and even more so in the debates between President Trump and Joe Biden in the lead-up to the 2020 US Presidential election. Tim Dare and Justine Kingsbury, "Putting the Burden of Proof in Its Place: When Are Differential Allocations Legitimate?," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 46 (2008): 505.
[38] John Scenters-Zapico, "The Case for the Sophists," *Rhetoric Review* 11, no. 2 (1993): 356-57.
[39] Ibid., 357.

speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself'.[40] These are popularly known as *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. In our own day we do not expect *pathos* to play a significant role in persuasive speeches, but in Aristotle's day—that is, in the Athenian Assembly—all three of these persuasive elements were present. It is important to note, however, that if a policy failed, the speaker who advocated for it might be prosecuted for deceiving the people. Even the most persuasive speakers were in a precarious position. One session of the Assembly might vote for a policy he proposed, but another might decide against it. There were no parties as we know them, so no expectations for groups to consistently vote together as we expect now.[41] From time to time, the Assembly would reverse a decision it had made previously, when differently constituted or after having slept on an issue. Conducting warfare—and other issues, but it is warfare with which we are most interested here—in this way led, according to Nails, to 'some well-known debacles'.[42]

Plato finds it distasteful that rhetorical skill was considered more important than philosophical wisdom; he was opposed to the Sophists and the institutional sophistry of Athenian politics.[43] He expresses his distaste in the Ship of State analogy, which Socrates tells us shows 'what the most decent people experience in relation to their city' (VI.488a). The analogy describes a ship, the owner of which is short-sighted and hard of hearing, with a correspondingly deficient knowledge of seafaring. The sailors argue over the steering of the ship, though none of them is versed in navigation; indeed, they think navigation is an art which cannot be taught. They each try to persuade the shipowner to turn the rudder over to them. Sometimes, if unsuccessful in this pursuit, they kill the sailor who *has* succeeded, throw his body overboard, and, having incapacitated the shipowner with wine or some other drug, they take control of the vessel and sail away 'while drinking and feasting, in the way that people like that are prone to do' (VI.488c). Moreover, anyone who is skilled at persuading the shipowner to cede control of the vessel to them is praised as a navigator and thought to be knowledgeable about ships. They do not realise that navigation requires paying attention to the seasons, the stars, wind, and so on. Further, they do not believe that there is

---

[40]Aristotle, "Rhetoric," 1356a2-4.
[41] Roberts, *City of Sokrates*, 51.
[42] Nails, "Athenian Context," 12-13. P.J. Rhodes lists a number of examples, given by ancient authors, of what he calls the 'fickleness' of the Assembly. P.J. Rhodes, *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 357.
[43] Nails, "Athenian Context," 21.

any skill which would allow them to determine how they should steer their craft. In such a vessel someone who did actually have the knowledge (*technē* in Greek) required for navigation would be dismissed as a 'real star-gazer, a babbler, and a good for nothing' (VI.488e), and thought useless by the other crew. Plato should not be accused of subtlety here; Socrates notes that we will not be mistaken 'in likening those who rule in our cities at present to the sailors we mentioned just now, and those who are called useless stargazers to the true captains' (VI.489c). This is perhaps the only direct acknowledgement Plato makes of the local problems he is solving.[44] In the analogy, the shipowner symbolises the *dēmos*, the people; the body of citizens. Aristotle corroborates this in the *Rhetoric*, reporting that Plato takes the *dēmos* to be like a strong but short-sighted shipowner.[45] The problem, as Plato sees it, is that people who lack knowledge of how best to run the state are put in charge of running the state. More than this, those who lack this knowledge do not recognise that politics is something that we can have (or lack) knowledge about; they do not recognise that it is a certain skill-set. Because the government is guided by the opinions and persuasive ability of non-experts—the sailors in the analogy—it can abruptly change its mind, which can have terrible consequences, as we will see vividly illustrated by the aftermath of Arginusae. The Ship of State analogy is also nicely illustrated by the fiasco of the Sicilian expedition, to which we now turn.

3.1.1 The Sicilian Expedition and the Flight of Alcibiades

The expedition to Sicily in 415/4 illustrates Plato's Ship of State analogy, and gives a vivid picture of how chaotic and amateur Athenian politics could be. The expedition was nothing short of a catastrophe: Donald Kagan notes that it has been compared with the Gallipoli campaign in 1915 and with the American war in Vietnam in the 1960s and 70s.[46] The results of the expedition were grim. The men and ships sent were almost completely wiped out, there were rebellions in the wider empire, and Athens' enemies were joined in their war effort by the Persian Empire. All this contributed to a general opinion that Athens was finished.[47] Our focus is not on the expedition itself, but on three events which mostly preceded it: Nicias'

---

[44] Interestingly, Nails does not mention the Ship of State in "Athenian Context".

[45] David Keyt, "Plato and the Ship of State," in *Nature and Justice: Studies in the Ethical and Political Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, ed. David Keyt (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2017), 49-50. Aristotle, "Rhetoric," 1406b34-36.

[46] Donald Kagan, *The Peloponnesian War* (London: Viking, 2003), 251.

[47] Ibid.

interventions in the Assembly; the mutilation of the herms and the parody of the Mysteries; and the flight of Alcibiades.

According to the ancient historian Thucydides, one of our main sources about the war, the Athenians 'were bent on campaigning [in Sicily], their eagerness for complete conquest the truest cause'.[48] They had been eyeing its resources since the beginning of the war.[49] The pretext and impetus for the campaign came in the form of a request from two Greek cities on the island, Segesta and Leotini, who asked for help against the neighbouring city of Selinus and its protector, Syracuse.[50] The original proposal was to send sixty ships, the same number which had been sent on an earlier expedition in 424. The Assembly voted to send the fleet, and five days later held another session to vote anything else the three generals in charge of the expedition—Nicias, Alcibiades, and Lamachos—might need.[51] The debate between Nicias and Alcibiades at that meeting of the assembly is the first point to discuss.[52]

In the debate as Thucydides presents it, Nicias tried to dissuade his fellow Athenians from undertaking the expedition. He argued instead for restraint, to keep what they possessed and not exceed their limits.[53] The Athenians, on Nicias' account, could not afford to attack Sicily. The treaty with the Spartans existed in name only. Sparta had been forced into it, and still disputed its terms; some of their allies rejected it out of hand.[54] Alcibiades, on the other hand, argued that Athens could not afford *not* to attack Sicily: Athens was active by its very nature, so a lengthy peace would dull the skills and character which had brought the city to greatness.[55] Thucydides describes Nicias changing tack, 'deciding that he could no longer dissuade them with the same arguments but could probably change their minds by the magnitude of preparations if he made them considerable'.[56] Accordingly, Nicias gave a dire warning that a large force would be needed to successfully undertake the expedition; an Athenian triumph would depend on a large fleet, army, and significant support. Kagan

---

[48] Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Steven Lattimore (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 6.6.
[49] Lawrence A. Tritle, *A New History of the Peloponnesian War* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 76.
[50] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 253.
[51] Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 6.8.
[52] We should note that, like Plato's *Apology*, the speeches Thucydides puts into the mouths of Nicias and Alcibiades are not transcripts. Thucydides was not present at this debate. However, it is usual to treat these texts as though they *are* transcripts. This is another example of how our conclusions have to be a bit speculative due to the lack of firm evidence.
[53] Tritle, *History*, 147.
[54] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 256.
[55] Ibid., 259.
[56] Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 6.20.

86

suggests that, by so doing, Nicias may have been hoping to be contradicted and therefore have an opportunity to resign the command, washing his hands of the whole affair, possibly thinking that such a gesture from the most experienced and pious member of the leadership team might serve to temper the assembly.[57] It is important to understand Nicias' intentions here. Aware that his arguments for caution were less persuasive than Alcibiades' argument for a glorious victory, Nicias tried to overwhelm the Assembly with the idea of how much force would be needed, intending to force them to back down. Unfortunately, the gesture backfired. The assembly thought Nicias had given excellent advice, and asked him to recommend the size of the force he thought necessary.[58] Pressed to give details, he suggested 'no fewer than a hundred triremes . . . and a total of no fewer than five thousand Athenian and allied hoplites . . . the other contingent prepared in due proportion'.[59] In the heat of the moment, he neglected to ask for cavalry, despite the advantage he predicted the Syracusans would gain from their own cavalry. Against his own intentions, Nicias managed to convert a small expedition with limited goals and liability into a massive undertaking, with correspondingly advanced goals and expectations. Where the smaller force could fail with limited repercussions, the large armada's failure could spell disaster.[60] It was thanks to Nicias that Athens turned from a limited venture to an ill-conceived and unlimited commitment. Kagan notes that without Nicias' intervention Athens would have certainly sailed against Sicily in 415, but there would have been no chance of a major catastrophe.[61] Similarly, Alcibiades' speech—which, according to Nails, invoked the legendary hero Achilles to rouse enthusiasm—contributed to 'Athens' most catastrophic defeat'.[62]

The fiasco of the Sicilian expedition illustrates Plato's Ship of State analogy, and the need to put experts—'true captains'—in charge of affairs. Alcibiades and Nicias represent the sailors in the analogy; they are each trying to persuade the Assembly—the shipowner—to choose their preferred course. Nicias and Alcibiades can be meaningfully considered experts in their field, but they are hampered by two factors. The decision is taken out of their hands and place in the hands of the Assembly, and they both have to keep one eye on their reputations lest they fail to be re-elected as generals the following year. In order to persuade the Assembly,

---

[57] We might speculate that David Cameron, in resigning as the UK's Prime Minister in the wake of the Brexit referendum, may have had a similar design.
[58] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 260.
[59] Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 6.25.
[60] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 261.
[61] Ibid., 261.
[62] Nails, "Athenian Context," 11.

then, neither Nicias nor Alcibiades rely solely on a rational argument. They both appeal to the Assembly's emotions: Nicias to fear and caution; Alcibiades appeals to the desire for glory. Further, Alcibiades in particular has a personal agenda at work. In addition to the purely military problem of how best to attack Sicily, Alcibiades is seeking a significant military victory to bolster his reputation and long-term career ambitions. Both generals relied on election to retain their office. Therefore, in order to continue their careers, the Assembly had to be convinced to elect them the next year.[63] As we discussed earlier, neither Nicias nor Alcibiades is making a truth-directed argument. While Nicias does appear to be at least partly motivated by the belief that the expedition would not succeed, Alcibiades is trying to advance his own agenda.

Shortly before the fleet was to sail, Athens awoke to find most of the stone statues of Hermes (called herms), which stood in many parts of the city, had had their faces smashed during the night. Herms were placed at the entrances to sacred sites and private homes, to ensure good fortune.[64] Worse, it was claimed that at a private party some young men had parodied the Eleusinian Mysteries; they had mocked the sacred rituals, perhaps, among other things, cross-dressing,[65] and all in the presence of those uninitiated into the cult. Worst of all, Alcibiades was implicated in both activities, and while he claimed to be innocent, many were prepared to believe the worst.[66] The attacks on the herms, a sacrilegious act, was likely directed against the expedition to Sicily; an attempt to prevent the fleet from sailing by symbolically attacking Hermes, protector of travellers. The parodies of the mysteries, on the other hand 'did not have any political significance'.[67] While it is most likely that Alcibiades was involved in the parody of the mysteries,[68] he almost certainly played no part in the mutilation of the herms.[69] By attributing this irreligious activity to Alcibiades, his opponents aimed to discredit him just as the expedition to Sicily was ready to sail. That is, they aimed to paint Alcibiades as

---

[63] A modern version of this problem is the election of judges in the United States: while a judge must make appropriate judicial decisions, they must also keep one eye on public opinion if they wish to be re-elected. This is most obviously on display with candidates for judicial office. For example, in the case of Caperton v. A.T. Massey Coal Co. Inc., Caperton was originally awarded $50 million in damages for fraud. Massey appealed the case to the West Virginia Supreme Court. One of the Justices on the Supreme Court had recently been elected, Massey had provided $3 million to the election campaign; the case was overturned. The US Supreme Court found that this Justice should have recused himself and reversed the lower court's decision. Caperton el al. v. A.T. Massey Coal Co., Inc., et al. 556 U.S. 868, 903 (2009).
[64] Armand D'Angour, *Socrates in Love: The Making of a Philosopher* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 107-08.
[65] Ibid., 109.
[66] Tritle, *History*, 149.
[67] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 266.
[68] Tritle, *History*, 150.
[69] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 267.

impious and disfavoured by the gods just as the expedition he had advocated was about to get underway. The mutilation of the herms illustrates another attempt to persuade the Assembly to change its mind, by provoking Athenian religious superstitions, not by rational argument. It is also an indication of how public opinion can be deployed to put pressure on the Assembly to try to force it onto a particular course. In this case it did not work but we will see in the Arginusae trial how public opinion could be very persuasive, to Athens' detriment.

In the aftermath of the mutilation of the herms, Alcibiades requested an immediate trial, arguing that it was not sensible to send him on an important expedition before he had been judged. But his enemies, 'fearing that he would have the army partial to him if tried right away, and that the populace would be lenient . . . urged that he sail now and not delay the departure but come back and stand trial within a specified period, wanting him to go on trial when recalled under heavier incrimination, which they expected to bring about more easily in his absence'.[70] Once the fleet was in Sicily, word came from Athens that Alcibiades was to return to face charges for his alleged participation in the 'acts of religious vandalism' which had taken place before the fleet's departure.[71] That is, both the mutilation of the herms and the profanation of the Mysteries.[72] While Alcibiades seems to have been initially willing to comply, it seems that he learned how the situation in Athens lay, and decided to escape.[73] He could not have expected to prevail in the absence of his strongest supporters. He fled to Sparta, where he revealed Athenian plans and strength. It is possible that he helped persuade the Spartans to send reinforcements to Sicily, which, while only a small contingent, improved Syracusan morale and the Spartan commander, Gylippus, proved a valuable military adviser.[74] In Athens, Alcibiades was convicted *in absentia*, condemned to death, his property confiscated, and a reward of a talent offered for his capture or death.[75] Seven years later, in 407, Alcibiades returned to his home city in triumph, but after the naval defeat at Notium the following year his career ended in permanent exile.[76] A political vendetta was given priority over military success.

---

[70] Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 6.29.

[71] Tritle, *History*, 151.

[72] Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 6.53.

[73] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 273.

[74] Tritle, *History*, 152-53.

[75] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 273. A talent was a weight of silver, not a denomination. One talent is equivalent to 6,000 drachmas, and enough to pay a trireme's crew for a month. Roberts, *City of Sokrates*, 253.

[76] Nails cites the example of the once-condemned Alcibiades being invited back with open arms as one of the irrational and contradictory actions which could make the Assembly an object of fear as much as one of respect. Nails, "Athenian Context," 14.

The Sicilian Expedition gives us a good picture of the chaos of Athenian politics. Plato finds his tendency towards chaos problematic, and his solution is straightforward: government of the city should be placed in the hands of experts. In *Protagoras*, Socrates points out that 'when we convene in the Assembly and the city has to take some action on a building project, we send for builders to advise us; if it has to do with the construction of ships, we send for shipwrights; and so forth . . . but when it is a matter of deliberating on city management, anyone can stand up and advise them [the Assembly]' (*Protagoras* 319b-d). Not so in Kallipolis. In the ideal city, the rulers are those who are 'by nature good at remembering, quick to learn, high-minded, graceful, and a friend and relative of truth, justice, courage, and moderation' (*Republic* VI.487a).[77] Such individuals are philosophers: the famous philosopher-kings. Until they come to rule, Socrates argues, 'cities will have no rest from evils, Glaucon, nor, I think, will the human race' (V.473d). Philosophers are defined as those who are 'able to grasp what is always the same in all respects' (VI.484b)—that is, philosophers have knowledge of the Forms. This follows from the principle of specialisation which we discussed in Chapter 1; that each of us is 'suited to one task, another to another' (II.370a-b). It follows, then, that only those who are naturally suited to govern the city should be permitted to do so. By committing government to experts, Plato divorces economic and political power from one another: the producers have all the wealth and property, but no political power.[78] This is an important aspect of the unity of opposites, which we discuss in the next section. David Sedley wonders how the Forms can help philosophers rule the city; while one can know Justice itself, he argues that one cannot know that a given policy is just, because such things are not, in Plato's terms, the subject of knowledge properly understood.[79] The Ship of State analogy clarifies things here, as David Keyt argues, for the stars upon which the true navigator must rely represent the Forms. This is made explicit when the imagery of stars appears in the allegory of the Cave, later in *Republic*.[80] Plato also addresses this question in an earlier dialogue, the *Phaedo*, where he explains how we can recognise qualities such as equality in things by reference to the Form of the Equal. Everything we perceive as equal is 'striving to reach that which is Equal but falls short of it' (*Phaedo* 75b).[81]

---

[77] In Chapter 1 we noted that that justice, courage, and moderation are three of the four virtues which the ideal city exemplifies. The fourth is wisdom (IV.427e).

[78] Annas, *Introduction*, 173.

[79] David Sedley, "Philosophy, the Forms, and the Art of Ruling," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, ed. G.R.F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 261.

[80] Keyt, "Ship of State," 53.

[81] This is offered as part of the Argument from Recollection, which seeks to demonstrate that we have knowledge of the Forms in our souls before we are born, and that when we "learn" something, we are really just remembering what we knew before our birth.

The same is true of justice (75d). Because the philosopher-kings know Justice itself, they can recognise the justice in a particular policy, based on how closely it is able to approximate the Form.

The need to persuade the Assembly and to keep one eye on re-election led Athens into difficulty; the ideal city avoids these problems. Where Athenian generals earned their position by persuading the Assembly to elect them for a one-year term, their counterparts in Kallipolis hold their rank and position purely by virtue of their merit and ability as auxiliaries. They do not have to persuade anybody.[82] The practical outcome of this, for Plato, is to ensure that the ideal city's fighting force will be second to none, though Plato seems to consider the auxiliaries' role as defensive, not offensive. Socrates is clear that the ideal city will, 'even if it has only a thousand men to fight for it, be the greatest. Not in reputation . . . but the greatest in fact' (IV.423a).[83] One reason for this is that Kallipolis, unlike Athens, has a professional army. There is no evidence for significant tactical training for the Athenian militias.[84] In the terms of the Ship of State, if we hand over the tiller to a captain who knows the science of navigation, our course will be smoother and more direct. In making plans, auxiliaries might have to convince their superiors to approve a particular plan of action, but all parties involved have the relevant experience. Further, the auxiliaries have no private agenda; their purpose in planning and executing a military campaign is only to successfully execute the campaign. Alcibiades in particular had a personal agenda alongside his military agenda in persuading the Assembly to undertake the Sicilian expedition. An auxiliary has no such personal agenda. The separation of private and public interests is important to Plato's ideal state.

The principle of specialisation is important here, as well. Recall that one of Plato's foundational assumptions in creating his ideal state is that each of us is suited by nature to one task or profession, and that we ought to only focus on that task. This principle informs many of the proposals we have seen here. Expertise was impossible to develop in Athens; in Kallipolis it is essential. Similarly, in Athens important strategic decision-making was the

---

[82] Plato gives no indication about how the auxiliaries will be organised, except presumably that they are subordinate to the rulers, who are, remember, chosen from the auxiliaries' ranks. However, this is not a problem: recall that Plato is aiming to produce a sketch of the ideal state, not a blueprint. Like a scale model, he only includes the features which he wants us to see.

[83] This figure is intended only as a minimum. G.M.A. Grube, "The Marriage Laws in Plato's *Republic*," *The Classical Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1927): 98 n. 2.

[84] Nails, "Athenian Context," 10.

province of the Assembly; in Kallipolis untrained individuals have no voice in strategy, for it is not part of being a producer. Instead, as noted earlier, Kallipolis has a professional military, which Athens did begin to adopt by 391.[85]

As a final note to this point, the allegory of the Cave gives epistemological support to Plato's argument for putting philosophers in charge of the ideal state. The allegory describes prisoners in chains, who pass the time by identifying the shadows cast by various objects on the wall of the cave in front of them. Any one among them who 'was sharpest at identifying the shadows . . . and who best remembered which usually came earlier, which later, and which simultaneously, and could thus best divine the future' would be honoured by the others (VII.516c-d). At some point, Plato tells us, one prisoner is unshackled and taken up to the surface, out of the cave. The freed prisoner is eventually able to recognise, that the shadows are mere reflections of reality, and do not accurately reflect the way things are. In this allegory, the prisoners represent the Athenian *dēmos*, the people, just as in the Ship of State analogy. The freed prisoner represents the philosopher-king. The philosopher has knowledge which the others lack: they know the way things *really are*; they have knowledge of the Forms. The other prisoners not only lack this knowledge, they do not even realise that it is something which it is possible to have knowledge about. The philosopher-king ought to rule, Plato argues, because they know the way things are, in particular they know Justice and the Good. It is a natural extension of the proposals that experts should be in charge, and that labour should be specialised.[86]

3.2 Unity of Opposites: Tension and Dependence

Kallipolis is designed to be as unified as possible, in order to prevent instability. But as we will see, it is a unity of opposites. This unity is in marked contrast to the stratified nature of Athenian society, which divided its residents into three distinct classes: citizen, metic, and slave.[87] In 451/50, the statesman Pericles introduced a reform where, in order to qualify as a citizen, one had to have parents who were *both* Athenian citizens, where previously an Athenian father had been sufficient.[88] Thus, the class of citizen was significantly restricted.

---

[85] Ibid., 11.
[86] Ibid., 21.
[87] Demetra Kasimis, "Plato's Open Secret," *Contemporary Political Theory* 15, no. 4 (2016): 340.
[88] Thorley, *Athenian Democracy*, 59.

As well as this, there were five "sub-classes" of citizen, based on the amount of productive land one owned.[89] The citizens, including women and children, made up only about half the total population of Attica; the other half was made up of metics and slaves. Metics were resident foreigners. They were forbidden to own property, a right granted only to citizens. Cephalus, the old man whose son's house provides the setting for *Republic*, was one such metic, originally from Syracuse. That Plato chose to set the dialogue at Cephalus' house is interesting. Slaves are not discussed much in *Republic*—or anywhere else in Plato's works—so we do not discuss them here, either.[90]

Unity is vital to a stable city. Socrates says that a great many cities are in fact 'two cities at war with one another, that of the poor and that of the rich' (IV.422e-423a). This duality can be exploited: 'if you approach them as many and offer to give to the one city the money, power, and indeed the very inhabitants of the other, you'll always find many allies and few enemies' (*Republic* IV.423a).[91] A city which is not unified is not stable. The goal is to establish a just city, which means it must be stable. To create a stable city, Plato aims to foster a principle of unity in Kallipolis as much as possible. The limit on how large the city should grow is dependent on a willingness to remain *one* city. Socrates argues that 'in establishing our city, we aren't aiming to make any one group outstandingly happy but to make the whole city so, as far as possible' (IV.420b). As in all political arrangements, individuals must make certain sacrifices for the good of the whole.[92] To this end, the rulers must be watchful against both wealth and poverty entering the city, for 'the former makes for luxury, idleness, and revolution; the latter for slavishness, bad work, and revolution as well' (IV.422a). Slightly later on, Socrates advises that the city ought not be too large or too small. This is a similar idea to Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, where 'a master of any art avoids

---

[89] Ibid., 13-14.

[90] The status of slaves and slavery in Plato's ideal city has been the subject of much contention. Gregory Vlastos argues compellingly that there *will* be slaves in the ideal city, on the basis that slavery was part of Athens' status quo, and if Plato had wanted to challenge the status quo he would have said so—but he does not. Brian Calvert argues just as compellingly that there will *not* be slaves in the ideal city. Calvert's argument is based on three reasons: there is no role for slaves in the ideal city; slaves are incompatible with the tripartite structure of the city; and there could be no slave-owners, due to what Plato says about the nature of owning slaves. I would note also that the institution of slavery does not seem compatible with the principle of unity. Gregory Vlastos, "Did Slavery Exist in Plato's *Republic*?," *Classical Philology* 63, no. 4 (1968): 291-92; Brian Calvert, "Slavery in Plato's *Republic*," *The Classical Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (1987).

[91] It is not clear from this passage in isolation, and Plato does not say this explicitly, but from context he seems to have in mind offering the money, power, and inhabitants of the rich city to the poor, rather than the other way around.

[92] Klosko, "Implementing the Ideal State," 370.

excess and defect'.[93] The city must be neither too big nor too small, neither too rich nor too poor, and so on. That is, it must not grow beyond its natural limits of unity, whatever those limits might be. There are three aspects to the principle of unity to discuss: the unity of opposites; the Noble Lie; and guardian living arrangements and marriage practices.

I noted above that the politically crucial divide in Kallipolis was between the producers on the one hand and the guardians on the other. The producers, or money-makers, have all the wealth; guardians are prohibited from owning property. We will look more closely at the guardians' living arrangements below, but this divide creates a unity of opposites: the producers have all the wealth and none of the political power; the guardians have all of the political power and none of the wealth. This creates a significant tension at the heart of the ideal state. The producers have at least some desire for wealth, as Socrates describes at II.373a, but the guardians must prevent excessive wealth, which will result in 'luxury, idleness, and revolution' (IV.422a).[94] The tension between the two classes is like that of a strung bow; the shaft is unable to straighten out due to the string pulling its two ends together. The political divide also creates a mutual dependency, worth noting: the guardians depend on the producers for sustenance; the producers depend on the guardians for protection. This idea of a unity of opposites is not original to Plato; it can be found in Heraclitus' fragments as well. In one (perhaps dubiously attributed) fragment, Heraclitus says that 'what opposes unites'; in another he complains that 'they do not understand how, while differing from [itself] . . . it is in agreement with itself. There is a back-turning connection, like that of a bow or lyre'.[95]

Plato uses the Noble Lie to foster the principle of unity in two ways. It forms the city into one large family, and rationalises the class divisions to be on the basis of ability rather than birth. The citizens are taught that they are all *autochthonous*, born from the earth.[96] Thus, they are all related; so Plato turns the city into one huge family.[97] Further, the Noble Lie says that when people are made, a certain metal is mixed in to their souls: gold for the rulers; silver for

---

[93] Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," 1106b4-5.

[94] Haewon Jeon makes an interesting argument that the producers' desires would be fairly moderate. That may be so, but even moderate desires must be moderated by something. Haewon Jeon, "The Interaction between the Just City and Its Citizens in Plato's Republic: From the Producers' Point of View," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52, no. 2 (2014).

[95] Heraclitus, *Fragments: A Text and Translation, with a Commentary by T.M. Robinson*, ed. and trans. T.M. Robinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 15, 37.

[96] Schofield, "The Noble Lie," 138.

[97] Brisson, "Plato's View," 95.

auxiliaries; iron and bronze for farmers and other craftsmen.[98] For the most part, people will produce children whose metal matches their parents' but, from time to time, a child will be born whose metal is different to that of their parents—in reality, a child will achieve results in the testing programme to indicate that they belong in a different class to their parents. Thus 'the first and most important command from the god to the rulers is that there is nothing that they must guard better or watch more carefully than the mixture of metals in the souls of the next generation' (III.415b). The Noble Lie is one of the features of Plato's ideal state which is very strange to modern readers, but Plato does seem to think that the inhabitants of Kallipolis will actually believe it: in the best-case scenario, he says, even the rulers themselves will believe that it is literally true (III.414c).[99] The effect of believing this myth will make the people 'care more for the city and each other' (III.415d). One suggestion is that the Noble Lie is aimed at the rulers first of all, in an effort to make them more public-spirited.[100] This perhaps eases the tension between power and wealth, though it cannot erase it altogether. The contrast here between Athens and Kallipolis is significant: the Noble Lie divides the citizenry on the basis of ability, not birth or land ownership.[101] For Plato, the city will reach its full potential when each of its parts accomplishes its proper function, just as in the individual's soul.[102] The Noble Lie is a way of keeping each part in its proper place. This creates a class structure which is essential to the survival of the city, but does so in such a way that believing it fosters unity in the city by turning it into one big family—though, one which has a balance of power against wealth. A just city, properly understood as one in which the Noble Lie is carefully followed, is the only way to establish unity and concord.[103] The Noble Lie ensures the city's stability, keeping the tension of the unity of opposites in check.

It may seem counter-intuitive to a modern reader that any political arrangement which is designed to be completely just could rely on deception. However, Jon Hesk points out that,

---

[98] Incidentally, this theme of three kinds of people is originally Pythagorean. According to Diogenes Laertius, Pythagoras talked about three kinds of visitors to the Olympic Games: 'some went to compete for the prize and others went with wares to sell, but the best as spectators; for similarly, in life, some grow up with servile natures, greedy for fame and gain, but the philosopher seeks for truth'. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R.D. Hicks, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 2: 327-29.

[99] In our own day we are accustomed, perhaps, to reject supernatural explanations, but the supernatural was not so forthrightly rejected in Plato's day. He could trace the ancestry on both sides of his family to the god Poseidon, for example. Ibid., 1: 277.

[100] Schofield, "The Noble Lie," 159.

[101] Of course, the Noble Lie actually says that we are born with a certain metal in our souls, and the education system is just trying to find out what that metal is. In fact, the education system is determining what we are best suited for, whereupon we are told which metal is in our soul. The Noble Lie is, after all, a *lie*.

[102] Brisson, "Plato's View," 95.

[103] Ibid., 96.

for Plato, there are times when lying is a moral necessity.[104] Plato makes a distinction between lies and fictions, where the latter are falsehoods which can be used to some good purpose; they can prevent harm.[105] In our own day, we might think it is morally acceptable to deceive a child who refuses to take medicine, in order to get them to successfully take it. This paternalistic approach seems to exist in Plato's time as well; Hesk notes three examples of just deception: deceiving an enemy in war; tricking an ailing son into taking medicine; and a general raising his disheartened troops' spirits by telling them reinforcements are on the way. Deception for someone's own good seems to be justifiable, then. Indeed, in the *Odyssey* Odysseus admits that he did not tell his crew about the sea monster Scylla for fear of provoking panic.[106] This suggests that the Noble Lie is not incompatible with justice in the ideal city. It is also in direct opposition to the foundational myth of Athens, which held that Athenians were entitled to Attica because they had always owned it. This is why metics could never achieve citizenship. The Noble Lie, on the other hand, carries implications of universal siblinghood.[107]

The living arrangements prescribed for the guardians are designed, at least in part, to support the principle of unity. By denying the guardians private property and access to personal wealth, there is nothing to split their loyalty. The prohibition of private property is intended to avoid them becoming like sheepdogs, who 'through licentiousness, hunger, or some other bad trait of character . . . do evil to the sheep and become like wolves instead of dogs' (III.416a). While the education programme will go some way towards keeping the auxiliaries 'gentle to each other and to those they are guarding' (III.416c), it will also be important to ensure they have the right sort of housing and other property, so the guardians live communally and are forbidden from owning property. Adeimantus objects that Socrates is not making the guardians happy: 'the city really belongs to them [the guardians], yet they derive no good from it' (IV.419a). While others may own property, build fine houses, and

---

[104] Jon Hesk, *Deception and Democracy in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 152.

[105] Nails, "Athenian Context," 14. The language of 'lies' and 'fictions' is Nails'; Plato refers to 'true falsehoods' and 'absolute falsehoods' at II.382a-d.

[106] Hesk, *Deception and Democracy in Classical Athens*, 151-52. Odysseus tells his men, frightened by the sight of the great whirlpool Charybdis, 'this is no greater evil now that it was when the Cyclops had us cooped in his hollow cave . . . but even there, . . . we escaped away'. He later admits that 'I had not spoken yet of Skylla, a plague that could not be dealt with, for fear my companions might be terrified and give over their rowing, and take cover inside the ship'. Homer, *The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York: HarperPerennial, 1967), XII. 209-25.

[107] Nails, "Athenian Context," 14.

amass great wealth, the auxiliaries 'are simply settled in the city like mercenaries and that all they do is watch over it' (IV.419-420a). Socrates' defence, as noted above, is that the aim is to make the whole city as happy as possible, rather than to benefit any particular group (IV.420b). Socrates warns that 'you mustn't force us to give our guardians the kind of happiness that would make them something other than guardians' (IV.420d). He makes the comparison with clothing a farmer in purple robes and gold finery and telling them to work the land whenever they please. Doing so would be detrimental to the farmer's effectiveness as a farmer, and would ultimately be detrimental to their happiness. Because the guardians have no private property, 'they'll be spared all the dissension that arises between people because of the possession of money, children, and families' (V.464d-e). As a result, the guardians will live at peace with one another, and 'if there's no discord among the guardians, there's no danger that the rest of the city will break into civil war, either with them or among themselves' (V.465b). That is, the producers will not revolt against the guardians, nor will the guardians clash among themselves. Aristotle is critical of these proposals, arguing the result would be 'two states within one, each hostile to the other'.[108] Plato is echoing a long tradition of Greek political philosophy in seeing greed as a prime force for destructiveness.[109] Thus he tries to avoid the possibility of the city's rulers bringing the city to destruction through their own greed. How effective this will be presumably depends on how well the education systems works to reduce the guardians' desires for property, for example. Nails describes Plato's proposals as a series of counterweights; the gender equality and marriage practices prescribed for the guardians are an important counterweight to Athenian social practices, and they support the principle of unity.[110]

The guardians are subjected to a eugenics programme in order to maintain the principle of unity. Socrates argues that if we want the class of auxiliaries to be of the highest possible quality, then only the best auxiliaries should be permitted to have children, and this must be arranged so that only the rulers are aware of the deception (V.459d-e). In order to facilitate this eugenics programme, certain 'festivals and sacrifices will be established by law'

---

[108] Aristotle, "Politics," 1264a25.

[109] Schofield, *Political Philosophy*, 251.

[110] Nails argues further that Plato's educational programme, and the gender equality inherent in it, applies to both sexes equally. Her reasoning for taking the programme as universal is that all the city's offspring must be carefully watched for signs of talent which, in the language of the Noble Lie, indicate a different metal in the child to that of their parents. It would not be possible to separate the gold from the bronze if there were no early opportunities for children to be observed on an equal basis. Nails notes that this marks the first explicit recommendation in Western philosophy for universal education. Nails, "Athenian Context," 17-18.

(V.459e) at appropriate times, at which those who are to "marry" are chosen by a carefully rigged lottery, so that 'the inferior people we mentioned will blame luck rather than the rulers when they aren't chosen' (V.460a). Once the children from these marriages are born, they are either taken to a crèche in a separate part of the city, or, if 'born defective', probably secretly exposed (V.460c). G.M.A. Grube speculates that, if there are 5000 guardians, then about sixty children would be born per year, on average.[111] Here Plato is tinkering with Athenian social practices to rationalise them but, more importantly, to foster unity. These mating festivals are a rationalised version of Athenian marriage practices, which were a type of property transaction; women were the property of their husband or a male relative.[112] Luc Brisson identifies this breeding programme as another way in which Plato seeks to make conflict impossible. The family unit competes with other families to gain wealth and power; arranged marriages are part of that competition, and this is a source of conflict. By abolishing the family unit for the guardian class, Plato prevents this kind of conflict.[113] Nothing is more important than the guardians' loyalty to the city. A traditional household and family would divide that loyalty—therefore the traditional household must be abolished. This does not matter for the productive class, so they are not subject to the same community of women and children. Indeed, Nails argues that the rigging of the "marriage" lottery, which is so offensive to our modern sensibilities, becomes less disturbing when compared with the Athenian background, and suggests that it may have been more appealing than the practices which Athenian women endured.[114] More than this, the guardian living arrangements and breeding programme follow from the principle of specialisation: managing a household and raising children are not part of what it means to be an effective guardian.

Annas argues that Plato 'thinks of unity as what *defines* a city'.[115] He uses the Noble Lie to foster inter-class unity by turning the city into one big family. Within the guardian class, Plato takes steps to ensure that the rulers and guardians have no conflict between their own private interests and the interests of the city by eliminating private interests. Guardians have no private property and no nuclear family unit to distract them from providing for the good of

---

[111] Grube, "Marriage Laws," 98.
[112] Nails, "Athenian Context," 20.
[113] Brisson, "Plato's View," 95.
[114] Nails, "Athenian Context," 20. Women—it would be more accurate to describe them as girls—were often married to an uncle or first cousin, in order to keep the family estate together. The girl would often be in her first year of puberty, married to a man in his thirties. No regard was taken of female sentiment or inclination. In Kallipolis, at least, a woman cannot participate in the marriage festivals until she is at least twenty years of age; a man has to be at least twenty-five.
[115] Annas, *Introduction*, 104. Annas's emphasis.

the city. Malcolm Schofield suggests that Plato cannot think of a way to motivate someone to care for the city independent of creating what Schofield calls a 'holistic political ideology'.[116] The Noble Lie seeks to transform the citizens' interests, as well as deceiving them as to why they should have those interests. That he takes so drastic and shocking a step is interesting, and suggestive of his motivations. The principle of unity is vital to the survival of the city, so it simply *must* be fostered. The disunity of Athens—the class division, and the conflict between public and private interests—makes it unstable, in Plato's view. Kallipolis will not suffer from this instability, thanks to the unity with which Plato has provided it. The instability of Athenian politics can be nicely illustrated by the suddenness with which the Assembly could change its mind, and the unfortunate consequences of its doing so. This is epitomised by the aftermath of the battle of Arginusae.

3.2.1 The Pyrrhic Victory at Arginusae

There are two points which are nicely illustrated by the aftermath of the battle of Arginusae: Athenian democracy was unstable, and the pressure of public opinion could lead to instability as well. In 406, towards the end of the war, Athens and its allies won a significant victory over the Spartan fleet at Arginusae, near the coast of modern Turkey. The battle would have been a straightforward and impressive victory but for its aftermath. The Athenians failed to retrieve many of the bodies of their dead, as well as failing to rescue many survivors. Properly burying their dead would have been almost as important to the Greeks as rescuing the survivors. In the *Odyssey*, for example, Odysseus went to the underworld to ensure that a fallen comrade has been appropriately interred.[117] The Athenians failed to retrieve their dead and the survivors for two main reasons. Much valuable time had been lost while the fleet reconvened and debated what to do.[118] Eventually the rescue mission was entrusted to two captains, Theramenes and Thrasybulus.[119] As the rescue operation got underway, a storm blew up. Aegean storms are sudden and fierce, a danger even to modern vessels. The triremes, much less secure, were not well-suited to such conditions.[120] As a result, many Athenians drowned and few bodies would have been recovered.[121]

---

[116] Schofield, "The Noble Lie," 156. Schofield's emphasis.
[117] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 459.
[118] Jessica Tolbert Roberts, "Arginusae Once Again," *The Classical World* 71, no. 2 (1977): 108.
[119] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 459-60.
[120] Ibid., 460.
[121] Tritle, *History*, 209.

Thus far, Arginusae is a victory, and a significant one. The Pyrrhic part comes later. The generals omitted from their dispatch all mention of the rescue being entrusted to Theramenes and Thrasybulus, and put all the blame for its failure on the storm. But, in private communications home they alluded to the two captains; an inconsistency with disastrous consequences.[122] The two captains returned to Athens immediately after the battle, probably to defend themselves if necessary. So far as the Athenians knew, the generals had been in charge of every aspect of the rescue mission; their conduct was called into question. Once news of the public sentiment reached the fleet, the generals assumed that Theramenes and Thrasybulus were responsible for discrediting them, so wrote to Athens and revealed that the rescue mission had been assigned to the two captains.[123] However, the captains pushed the blame squarely back on the generals, who were ordered back to Athens to face trial. Two fled into exile at once and one general, Erasinides, was tried separately and convicted of misappropriation of public money and misconduct in office; he was subsequently imprisoned.[124] The five remaining generals were tried by the Assembly, and it is in this trial that we can see the local problem which Plato's ideal state solves.

The trial took place over two sessions of the Assembly. The ancient historian Xenophon reports that the generals stuck to their initial defence, that 'it was the greatness of the storm that prevented the recovery'.[125] The Assembly seemed disposed towards acquittal when chance intervened. It growing dark before a vote could be taken, the assembly decided to postpone its decision until the next session.[126] Before that next session, the annual festival of the Apturia intervened, in the course of which family ties were greatly stressed, heightening the sense of loss in the city and calling attention to the number of bereaved families, which was considerable.[127] When the Assembly again convened, relatives of the dead, dressed in mourning clothes and with their heads shaved as part of ritual mourning, demanded

---

[122] Roberts, "Arginusae," 108.
[123] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 461.
[124] Ibid., 461-62.
[125] Xenophon, *The Hellenica (Greek History) of Xenophon of Athens: A Facing-Page Critical Edition and Translation from Greek into English*, ed. Donald F. Jackson and Ralph E. Doty (Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Pellen Press, 2006), 1.7.6.
[126] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 463. Kagan claims, inconsistently, that the next session of the Assembly was the following day. Xenophon reports only that the assembly decided to defer 'to another assembly'. Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 1.7.7.
[127] Roberts, "Arginusae," 109.

revenge.[128] Xenophon claims that associates of Theramenes arranged for this to occur.[129] During the trial, a council member named Callixeinus proposed that there be no further debate, but only a vote on the generals' guilt or innocence. The question would be whether the generals were judged guilty 'in not recovering the victors in the sea-battle'.[130] The penalty would be death and confiscation of their property. Finally—and significantly—the generals would be tried together, with one vote deciding all their fates.[131] This proposal has been compared to an Act of Attainder, in which guilt is declared by an act of a legislature, often without a trial.[132]

Some members of the *prytanies* presiding over the session refused to put the above question to a vote on the grounds that it was illegal on two counts. It violated the right for a person to be tried individually, and the generals had not been given the time or opportunity to speak in their defence, as prescribed by law. This would have been difficult to refute, but Callixeinus simply proposed that the same charges levelled against the generals include the recalcitrant *prytanies*, and the Assembly—deeply hostile to the generals—approved. The frightened *prytanies* withdrew their objections, except for Socrates who happened, by sheer chance, to be serving as *prostates*, the presiding officer of the assembly that day—the only public office he ever held. He alone refused to put the question to a vote.[133] Plato mentions this at *Apology* 32b-c. Unfortunately, after some more manoeuvring, the vote went ahead and the assembly voted to put all eight generals to death, including the two who never returned to Athens and Erasinides, who was already in prison. Thus, the victory at Arginusae became a defeat after the fact.[134]

The Pyrrhic nature of this victory quickly becomes apparent. At a stroke, Athens had been deprived of eight experienced and successful military leaders; few states at war can spare

---

[128] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 463.
[129] Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 1.7.8.
[130] Ibid., 1.7.9. There is a discrepancy with another historian's account of this trial. The Sicilian historian Diodorus reports that the generals were tried because they failed to gather the bodies of the dead; Xenophon says they were blamed for failing to save the shipwrecked survivors. Alexander Rubel, *Fear and Loathing in Ancient Athens: Religion and Politics During the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Michael Vickers and Alina Piftor (Durham: Acumen, 2014), 133.
[131] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 464.
[132] Basil Mitchell and J.R. Lucas, *An Engagement with Plato's Republic: A Companion to the Republic* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 118.
[133] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 464-65.
[134] Rubel, *Fear and Loathing*, 3.

such numbers.[135] Athens had to face Sparta and Persia without most of its best commanders, and those who replaced them must have been unnerved by the generals' fate. Indeed, the next major battle—the last battle of the Peloponnesian War—resulted in the almost total destruction of the Athenian fleet, though it is difficult to say how much of this loss can be directly attributed to the command decisions of the Athenian generals.

At the end of the first session of the trial, the Assembly looked poised to acquit the generals of any wrong-doing. Yet, the second session condemned them to death. We can be reasonably confident that public opinion played a significant part in changing the Assembly's mind in this case. Indeed, the enormous loss of life in the naval battle led many grieving Athenians to support a procedure which was 'unjust, much regretted, and probably illegal'.[136] It is likely that the members of the Assembly felt enormous public pressure to publicly punish the generals on behalf of the grieving families who had lost relatives in the naval battle. Because of emotional pressure and the pressure of public opinion, the Assembly was persuaded to take a different course to the one that it had been steering towards, with appalling consequences.[137]

The ideal city avoids the pressure of public opinion—as well as the problems associated with rhetoric and oratory, as there is no Assembly in Kallipolis for those skills to be used, and no space in the educational programme for Sophists. As noted above, the politically crucial divide in power in Kallipolis is between the producers and the guardians. The producers have no way to influence the guardians' decisions. This separation of powers, as it were, is enshrined in the principle of justice on which the city is based, that is, 'doing one's own work and not meddling with what isn't one's own' (IV.433d). When we remember the principle of specialisation, then it is clear that the producers can play no role in legal proceedings, as that is not part of being a producer. Accordingly, the guardians need not pay any attention to public opinion. Indeed, Plato is scathing about public opinion, comparing it to sophistry. When a large group of people

> are sitting together in assemblies, courts, theatres, army camps, or in some other public
> gathering of the crowd, they object very loudly and excessively to some of the things that are
> said or done and approve others in the same way, shouting and clapping, so that the very rocks
> and surroundings echo the din of their praise or blame and double it. In circumstances like

---

[135] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 466.

[136] Roberts, "Arginusae," 111.

[137] Earlier, I mentioned Rhodes's examples of the Assembly's 'fickleness'—this trial is one of those examples.

that, what is the effect, as they say, on a young person's heart? What private training can hold

out and not be swept away by that kind of praise or blame and be carried by the flood

wherever it goes, so that he'll say that the same things are beautiful or ugly as the crowd does

(VI.492b-c).[138]

Plato goes on to note that these sophists will 'punish anyone who isn't persuaded, with disenfranchisement, fines, or death' (VI.492d). This is vividly illustrated in the Arginusae trial, where those of the *prytaneis* who objected to the illegal proposal to try all the generals together were threatened with the same sentence. This episode dramatically illustrates at least one reason why Plato felt it necessary to deny the producers any political power. Perhaps the generals did deserve to be punished. They certainly wasted valuable time, and they tried to push blame onto Theramenes and Thrasybulus. However, it was hardly appropriate (not to mention probably illegal) to execute them during a war without any immediate replacements, and hardly appropriate to do so as an expression of grief. Earlier, we talked about the mutilation of the herms as an attempt to put pressure on the Assembly; here the pressure which the Assembly was under is even more evident.

3.3 The Thirty Tyrants

In Chapter 1, we talked about how the ideal state inevitably decays from the ideal regime into a series of progressively inferior regimes, the worst of which is tyranny. Socrates says that tyranny evolves from democracy (VIII.562a). The slide from democracy to tyranny is part of the decay from the ideal state. Though the collapse of the ideal state is inevitable, it must be resisted, and the way Plato designs the guardians' living arrangements is partly geared towards preventing the ideal state from decaying for as long as possible. The identification of tyranny as evolving from democracy may be a reaction to the reign of terror in Athens following the end of the Peloponnesian War, associated with a group known to history as the Thirty Tyrants.

The reign of the Thirty Tyrants began in the summer of 404, following Athens' surrender to Sparta. A committee of thirty magistrates was put in power, nominally as an interim measure. Officially, their task was to rewrite the laws, but their true ambition—like revolutionary dictatorships throughout history—was to fundamentally reshape the Athenian state and

---

[138] This reflects the institutionalised sophistry of the Athenian Assembly, which we discussed earlier.

society.[139] Aristotle reports that the Thirty were put in place by the Spartan general Lysander,[140] though Nails notes that Aristotle (or pseudo-Aristotle) is the first to make this claim; account still exist from those who lived through the Thirty's reign—Plato's and Xenophon's both survive, for instance—and none of those accounts question the legitimacy of the Thirty's authority. Rather, Nails comments that 'they say the kinds of things one says anywhere when dirty campaigns put the wrong men in office'.[141] We should also note that there are significant discrepancies between our two major sources about the Thirty's reign, Xenophon's *Hellenica*, and (pseudo-)Aristotle's *Athenian Constitution*. But, if we do not try to establish a definitive sequence of events, there are areas of significant agreement in these sources. Importantly, they agree about the brutality of the Thirty: violence was integral to the regime, and integral to its downfall.[142] Indeed, the thirteen-month reign of the Thirty Tyrants was a systematic campaign of murder and assassination without parallel in the history of classical Athens.[143]

The Thirty's overarching aim was to reshape Athens from the democracy we have encountered so far in this chapter to a narrow oligarchy.[144] To this end, the Thirty began by targeting those who were deemed responsible for the worst excesses and failures under the democracy; these first executions were met with enthusiasm.[145] The terror swiftly expanded to prescribe the wealthy, for gain, then against moderates, and even those among the Thirty themselves who protested that things had gone too far.[146] This violence was essential to the regime's purpose, to reshape democratic participants in government to mere subjects. Opposition had to be eliminated and survivors silenced so that they would accept this new role. This was achieved through fear, force, and intimidation.[147] The death toll during the Thirty's reign of terror has been put as high as 2500,[148] though 1500 is probably closer to the

---

[139] Janek Kucharski, ""I Was Following Orders": An Ancient Greek Archetype of Modern War Crime Legislation," *The European Legacy* 23, no. 1-2 (2018): 63.

[140] Aristotle, "Constitution of Athens," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. Two (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 34.

[141] Nails, *People*, 112.

[142] Andrew Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat: Civil War and Civic Memory in Ancient Athens* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 16.

[143] "The Violence of the Thirty Tyrants," in *Ancient Tyranny*, ed. Sian Lewis (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 213.

[144] Ibid., 214.

[145] Kucharski, "Following Orders," 63.

[146] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 485.

[147] Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat: Civil War and Civic Memory in Ancient Athens*, 22.

[148] Kucharski, "Following Orders," 63.

mark.[149] The democracy was restored after a brief civil war, after which a general amnesty was enacted to prevent anyone except 'a few of the worst criminals' from being prosecuted for their role in the oligarchy.[150] Many contemporary Athenian critics agreed that much of the Thirty's reign of terror had been motivated by greed, pure and simple.[151]

Plato lays 'the shadow of the Thirty and of its bloody failure' over the early part of *Republic*. The conversation takes place at Cephalus' house—a wealthy metic, as we discussed earlier. Both his sons, Polemarchus and Lysias, suffered under the Thirty; Polemarchus was murdered for his money, Lysias escaped to exile.[152] Plato argues that 'extreme freedom can't be expected to lead to anything but a change to extreme slavery, whether for a private individual or for a city' (VIII.564a). Plato had seen this evolution take place in his own lifetime, as Athens swung from democracy to tyranny, and the citizens of Athens, participants in democratic government, were converted into subjects, mere recipients of government.[153] The 'sole root' from which a tyrant sprouts (VIII.565d) is a special leadership—a Roman dictatorship, where an individual was given absolute power for a strictly-limited term in times of emergency, might be an example of such a special leadership. In the course of this leadership, the tyrant 'brings someone to trial on false charges and murders him (as tyrants so often do), and, by thus blotting out a human life, his impious tongue and lips taste kindred citizen blood' (VIII.565e). As a result, he is either killed by his enemies or 'transformed from a man into a wolf by becoming a tyrant' (VIII.566a). This is reminiscent of an earlier passage, where Socrates warns of the danger of raising sheepdogs in such a way that 'through licentiousness, hunger, or some other bad trait of character, they do evil to the sheep and become like wolves instead of dogs' (III.416a). This gives us somewhere to look for Plato's solution for preventing the city's leaders from becoming tyrannical wolves.

Shortly after Socrates makes the analogy with sheepdogs, he goes on to detail the guardians' living arrangements which, in combination with their education, will 'neither prevent them from being the best guardians nor encourage them to do evil to the other citizens' (III.416d). We have discussed these living arrangements above, in connection with the principle of

---

[149] Peter Krentz, *The Thirty at Athens* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 79.
[150] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*, 486.
[151] Schofield, *Political Philosophy*, 252.
[152] G. R. F. Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato's Republic* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 11.
[153] Though the civil war and restoration of the democracy shows that this process can perhaps be reversed.

unity. Here we can see how this solves the problem represented by the Thirty Tyrants. Indeed, the Thirty's reign illustrates the need to maintain the principle of unity and to ensure that the rulers have no personal interests; their interests are to be entirely identified with those of Kallipolis. While the Thirty may have begun reasonably well, in proscribing and executing those who had contributed to the democracy's failure, their expansion into attacking personal enemies and the wealthy in order to confiscate their assets marks a shift from the public interest to the personal. Plato prevents this from happening by ensuring that the guardians have no private interests separate from the interests of the city. Thus, they cannot act to fulfil a personal agenda, because they do not have one. As we have seen, the conflict between personal and public agendas has been a recurring problem in Athens. It played a role in the debate around the Sicilian expedition, public opinion influenced the Assembly's judgement of the generals after Arginusae, and public force was used to advance the Thirty's private interests. Though the decay from the ideal regime cannot be resisted indefinitely, separating private interests from the public interest seem to be an important way of resisting it for as long as possible.

3.4 The Trial and Execution of Socrates, 399

Our final illustration from Athens is the famous trial and execution of Socrates. We are investigating Brisson's claim that Plato uses his ideal state to create a city in which philosophers in general, and Socrates in particular, would not risk death.[154] However, there is an irony here. There is no place in Kallipolis for someone like Socrates, because there is no need for someone like him, as we will see. Let us start by examining Socrates' trial, and how it might have impacted Plato's decisions in constructing the ideal city. This is an interesting episode to consider, because it contrasts significantly with the others we have looked at. So far, we have been discussing systemic problems in Athens and with Athenian democracy. But the trial and execution of Socrates is intensely personal for Plato. It would be difficult to overstate the effect of Socrates' death. Emile Faguet does not mince words: 'the death of Socrates inspired all of Plato's hatreds'.[155]

---

[154] Brisson, "Plato's View," 93.
[155] Emile Faguet, *Pour Qu'on Lise Platon* (Paris: Boivin, 1905), 16. My translation.

Socrates was indicted in 399, accused of 'refusing to recognise the gods recognized by the state, and of introducing other new divinities. He is also guilty of corrupting the youth'.[156] Plato puts the charges in a different order: on his account, Socrates was accused of 'corrupting the young and of not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other new spiritual things' (*Apology* 24b-c). Indeed, he was guilty as charged, and there is no evidence that justice was not applied in his trial.[157] The defence which Socrates gave at his trial is dramatized by both Plato and Xenophon. He was found guilty, and consequently condemned to death, required to drink poison.

We should take a moment to consider the motivations for condemning Socrates. On the one hand, the trial can be described in straightforwardly religious terms. Socrates had peculiar, even deviant, religious views which, as Alexander Rubel notes, 'could certainly be labelled "radical"'.[158] The jurors could easily believe that these religious views posed a threat to the city, risking provoking divine displeasure. The charge of corrupting the youth has a more clearly political dimension: Socrates' actions might serve to undermine public morals.[159] Socrates claimed to have a 'divine or spiritual sign', a voice which advised him (*Apology* 31d). The Greek word is *daimonion*. Socrates' belief in his *daimonion* and his influence on the young men of the city, put together, suggest that he was blamed for undermining public morals and religion, and his *daimonion* was thought to contribute to this.[160]

On the other hand, it has been suggested that Socrates' trial was motivated by more than just a pious wish to have religious dissidents and those who corrupt the young punished; there may have been a political motivation as well. One question which invites this speculation is why the Athenians chose to prosecute Socrates in 399. As Socrates had behaved in the same way for years, it is difficult to understand why an accusation had not been brought him long before that, if Athenians found him so obnoxious.[161] The usual explanation is that Socrates was associated with Alcibiades, who we have discussed in connection with the Sicilian expedition, and Critias, one of the leaders of the Thirty. Socrates had remained in Athens during the Thirty's reign, though, on his own account, he refused to obey a tyrannical order to

---

[156] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, 1: 171.
[157] Rubel, *Fear and Loathing*, 146.
[158] Ibid., 154.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Edwin Carawan, *The Athenian Amnesty and Reconstructing the Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 207.
[161] Adela Marion Adam, ed., *The Apology of Socrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 15.

arrest the general Leon of Salamis. He claims that he 'might have been put to death for this, had not the government fallen shortly afterwards' (*Apology*, 32d-e). When the Thirty were driven out and the democracy restored, Socrates was distrusted more than ever, but the amnesty, mentioned above, prevented anybody from being prosecuted for their actions during that time. Accordingly, Socrates could not be prosecuted on purely political grounds, so his enemies had to find some other pretext for a trial.[162] The argument is that Socrates' trial was arranged on a convenient excuse with the *real* charge being kept concealed.

Edwin Carawan disputes this reading of Socrates' trial, pointing out that neither of Socrates' ancient defenders, Plato and Xenophon, suggest that Socrates' trial violated the amnesty.[163] There is also reason to doubt that Socrates' association with Alcibiades or Critias was of particular concern to a significant number of the jurors at the trial.[164] The answer to why Socrates was prosecuted in 399 specifically is rather to be found, on this account, in the post-war context of Athens. Athens had suffered significant trauma as a result of the Peloponnesian War, the Thirty's reign of terror, and ensuing civil war. Following significant trauma of this kind, there is often a resurgence of religious activity and a return to religious orthodoxy, as seen for example in Germany after the end of the Second World War, and in the former Soviet Union following the collapse of communism.[165] Further, the Athenians had a tendency to ascribe current misfortune to divine punishment. Socrates, with his deviant religious views, therefore represented a risk of further divine displeasure. The gadfly which had been put up with for so long could no longer be permitted to risk divine punishment being brought upon Athens.

Above, I said that there is an irony to the way in which Plato might deal with the death of Socrates. If the institutional structure of the ideal city is a response to Socrates' execution, as Brisson seems to think it is,[166] then it is an institutional structure which has no place for Socrates. Socrates spent his life interrogating those who claimed to be wise, seeking an answer to what the virtues are. In the *Apology*, he says that he serves a divine purpose, to try to persuade the Athenians 'to care for virtue' (*Apology* 31b), to persuade as many people as

---

[162] Ibid., 17.
[163] Carawan, *Amnesty*, 203.
[164] Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Socrates on Trial* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 86.
[165] Rubel, *Fear and Loathing*, 156.
[166] We should note that this is a somewhat curious view. Socrates sought answers to questions which, in the ideal state, are understood. The philosopher-kings are philosophers, but of a different sort to Socrates.

he can to care about the best possible state of their soul, as he describes it (30a-b). He also seeks to define the virtues. Indeed, *Republic* begins as a traditionally Socratic dialogue, seeking a definition of Justice. But, in Kallipolis, virtue is taken care of as the rulers *know* what Justice is, and ordinary justice is maintained by the strict observance of the class structure. If the ideal city is designed to somehow protect Socrates, it is an ironic kind of protection, for it leaves no place for Socrates in it.

If we agree with Brisson that Plato was inspired by the death of Socrates to design his ideal city such that the internal political conflicts—which Plato saw as having led to Socrates' death—could not occur,[167] then the institutions we have discussed already in this chapter seem to do this, most obviously by putting philosophers in charge of the city: those who know what Justice is, and who can most effectively guide the city's course. I have said that there is no place for Socrates in this ideal system, but that is not quite accurate. Plato says that the environment in which one is brought up and educated is very important. He thinks that 'the philosophic nature as we defined it will inevitably grow to possess every virtue if it happens to receive appropriate instruction, but if it is sown, planted, and grown in an inappropriate environment, it will develop in quite the opposite way, unless some god happens to come to its rescue' (VI.491e-492a). Socrates as Plato knew him had been educated in a highly inappropriate environment; if Socrates were born and raised in Kallipolis, there is no reason to suppose that he could not be the very model of the modern philosopher-king—though we should not insist upon this counterfactual.

There is a comment in the *Apology* which seems to relate to Brisson's argument that Plato wants to create a city in which philosophers would not risk death. Socrates' *daimonion* had warned him not to participate in Athenian politics, for risk of death. He tells the jury at his trial that 'if I had long ago attempted to take part in politics, I should have died long ago, and benefited neither you nor myself. Do not be angry with me for speaking the truth; no man will survive who genuinely opposes you or any other crowd and prevents the occurrence of many unjust and illegal happenings in the city' (*Apology* 31d-32a). The design of Plato's ideal city may have been influenced by the wish to provide an environment where those who could benefit the city would not be dissuaded from serving for fear of death.

---

[167] Brisson, "Plato's View," 94.

As an interesting aside, it is possible that the death of Socrates influenced the programme of censorship in Kallipolis. Towards the end of *Republic*, Socrates and Glaucon agree that poetry which is 'imitative' should be banned from the ideal city (X.595a), because it is 'likely to distort the thought of anyone who hears it' (X.595b). In *Apology*, Socrates acknowledges that he has to defend himself against his 'first accusers', and 'later accusers' (18a-b). Of the earlier accusers, none is more prominent than Aristophanes, who satirised Socrates in his play *Clouds*, where Socrates is depicted as a sophist who denies the existence of the Olympian gods, preferring his new deities, the clouds. Aristophanes would never have been permitted to write his play in Kallipolis. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with lying, though. Homer and Hesiod are banned not because they lie, but because there is nothing morally good in the lies that they tell.[168] As we have seen, the rulers are not above lying to their citizens for the greater good. This is not to say that there is a definite causal connection between Aristophanes and Plato's decision to censor poetry in Kallipolis, only an interesting possibility.

3.5 Conclusion

Plato thinks of himself as conducting a descriptive investigation into the nature of justice, based on assumptions about the way people actually are—the principle of specialisation in particular. If we assume that each person is naturally suited to one profession, then the structure of Kallipolis seems to follow logically from this, and the ideal city forms a general solution to the problem of social organisation. The principle of specialisation, however, does not tell the whole story about the structure of Plato's ideal state. To get that full story we need to dig into the historical context in which Plato lived and worked. By now it is evident that Plato thought ill of the political regime in Athens, and not without reason.[169] We have seen Plato use Kallipolis to solve a number of particular problems. He takes power out of the hands of the Assembly and gives it to those who are uniquely qualified to wield it, following the principle of specialisation. Plato thinks that there is a "science" of politics, and that the city will be best served by putting those in charge who are capable of understanding that science—and that the Assembly is manifestly incapable of so doing. Plato also wants his ideal city to be as unified as possible, so he makes every effort to promote that unity, turning

---

[168] Schofield, "The Noble Lie," 143.
[169] Mitchell and Lucas, *Engagement*, 117.

the city into one big family, and ensuring that the guardians have no personal interests separate from the interests of the city.

It is difficult to know just how Plato's contemporaries reacted to the ideal state described in *Republic* as we do not have many records of these reactions. One we do have is Aristotle, who spends time in *Politics* criticising Plato's state in detail, primarily attacking the abolition of the nuclear family and the prohibition on private property for the guardians. In particular, Aristotle attacks Plato's principle of unity, arguing instead in favour of 'self-sufficiency', which requires a lesser degree of unity.[170] Aristotle engages with *Republic* from a philosophical viewpoint rather than taking our historical approach; whether Aristotle recognised the local application of Plato's model of the ideal state is unknown, and probably unknowable.

The Sicilian expedition, the Arginusae trial, the rule of the Thirty Tyrants, and the death of Socrates are excellent illustrations of the types of particular problems Plato's ideal city is trying to solve. As I noted earlier, I cannot and do not claim that Plato is inspired by these *exact* events. The Sicilian expedition, for instance, took place in 415/4. Plato was born in 428/7, so would have been about 13 years old when Nicias and Alcibiades were debating in the Assembly; he would have not been permitted to attend the session, and it is unknown whether he would have remembered the events of the war clearly when he came to write *Republic*. However, these events are useful in that they illustrate the problems which Athens got itself into, and give us something to which Kallipolis can be compared, to see how the ideal city would avoid such pitfalls. The Sicilian expedition illustrates the need to put decision-making power in the hands of experts rather than relying on experts trying to persuade the uneducated populace—by any means necessary—and also illustrates the need to divorce leaders' private interests from the public interest. The Arginusae trial reminds us of the pressure of public opinion in a democratic context; in Kallipolis public opinion can be safely ignored. The Thirty Tyrants illustrate again the need to divorce public and private interests, and how tyrants can use the machinery of public interest for personal gain. Finally, the death of Socrates illustrates a need for the ideal city to provide a space where those with the appropriately philosophic nature can flourish and grow, rather than being condemned to death.

---

[170] Aristotle, "Politics," 1261b14-15.

4. Hobbes, *Leviathan,* and the English Revolution

We fast-forward some twenty centuries or so from the Athens of Plato's day to the England of the Stuart King Charles I. It is difficult to find a time more tumultuous than mid-seventeenth century England.[1] Indeed, even to choose a name for the period risks disagreement; "the English Revolution", "the Puritan Revolution", and "the English Civil Wars", among others, have all been used at different times.[2] In *Behemoth*, his history of the period, Thomas Hobbes calls them 'the Civil Wars in England'.[3] His most famous work, though, is *Leviathan*, published in 1651, which has been described as one of the greatest utopian works to come out of the English Revolution.[4] In *Leviathan*, Hobbes takes himself to be using the kind of deductive method which Euclid used in geometry to deduce the structure of the ideally best state. Though he recognises that his theory could apply locally, Hobbes takes his ideal state to be a general solution to the problem of social organisation, the natural result of the method he uses. But we are better to read the ideal state he proposes as a particular solution to problems in his own day. The ideal state Hobbes proposes might be generally applicable, but features of that state are not derived only from his theory of human nature, but also motivated by Hobbes's reaction to local problems he observed. Like Plato, Hobbes found contemporary government unsatisfactory. But where Plato was reacting to the inability of democratic Athens to effectively prosecute the Peloponnesian War, Hobbes was confronted by the inability of the English government to prevent a civil war.[5] *Leviathan* is a reaction and response to the power struggles between King Charles I and his parliaments, which culminated in the English Civil Wars (or, perhaps more properly, the Wars of the Three Kingdoms), fought between 1642 and 1651. Hobbes's experience of political discord, ultimately expressed as civil war, led him to believe that endless competition between people must always have appalling consequences.[6] Hobbes's ideal state is constructed to guarantee

---

[1] Jean Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1.

[2] Blair Worden, *The English Civil Wars, 1640-1660* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2009), 1-2.

[3] Thomas Hobbes, "Behemoth: The History of the Causes of the Civil Wars of England," in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, ed. Sir William Molesworth, vol. VI (London: John Bohn, 1840).

[4] Tuck, "The Utopianism of Leviathan," 125.

[5] It is interesting to note, in this Platonic connection, that one of Hobbes's early works was a translation of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, published in 1629. Noel Malcolm, "A Summary Biography of Hobbes," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. Tom Sorrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 20. Indeed, Thucydides and Hobbes are often cited, along with Machiavelli, as the early realists in political philosophy, perhaps in contrast with the archetypal idealist, Plato. See "Hobbes's Theory of International Relations," in *Aspects of Hobbes*, ed. Noel Malcolm (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002). It is worth noting that Malcolm challenges this view of Hobbes.

[6] Campbell and Hall, *The World of States*, 1.

that civil war could never become a threat. We start putting *Leviathan* into its historical context, and into the context of Hobbes's works.

Hobbes wrote *Leviathan* in exile in France, where he had fled in 1640, fearing persecution from his political enemies.[7] He spent much of the 1640s engaged in physics, metaphysics, and theology more than political philosophy, but towards the end of the decade his attention returned to political matters.[8] The earliest direct reference to *Leviathan* comes from a letter dated May 1650.[9] It has been suggested that Hobbes wrote the text in no more than a year, between winter 1649-50 and winter 1650-51,[10] though he may have been gathering some ideas and materials less systematically for quite some time previously.[11] The dedicatory letter is dated 25 April 1651, and was most probably written at a late stage. To give an idea of what else was happening at the time, 1651 also saw Charles II's defeat at the battle of Worcester in September, the last military confrontation of the Civil Wars.

We must keep in mind that *Leviathan* is the third political work that Hobbes wrote. The core elements of his proposals are the same among his three political works, *The Elements of Law* (*Elements*, hereafter) (1640), *De Cive* (1642), and *Leviathan* (1651).[12] Hobbes developed the fundamental principles of his political theory in the 1630s, during the period known as the personal rule of Charles I: the state of nature; his formulation of the laws of nature; and his absolutist conception of sovereignty.[13] To take just the state of nature as an example, Hobbes's picture of it as bleak and dangerous is clear in *Elements*,[14] and consistent across all three political works.[15] Though it is tempting to think of *Leviathan* as the culmination of Hobbes's thought, this temptation should be resisted. When the Latin edition of *Leviathan* was published in 1668, *De Cive* was republished alongside it, indicating that Hobbes thought

---

[7] Thomas Hobbes, "Considerations Upon the Reputation, Loyalty, Manners, and Religion of Thomas Hobbes," in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, ed. Sir William Molesworth, vol. IV (London: John Bohn, 1840), 414.

[8] Malcolm, "Summary Biography," 29.

[9] Malcolm, *Thomas Hobbes: Leviathan, Volume 1: Editorial Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), 1.

[10] Karl Schuhmann, "Leviathan and De Cive," in *Leviathan after 350 Years*, ed. Tom Sorrell and Luc Foisneau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 17.

[11] Malcolm, *Introduction*, 11.

[12] Malcolm, "Summary Biography," 28.

[13] Collins, *Allegiance*, 7.

[14] For example, Hobbes says that 'the estate of men in this natural liberty, is the estate of war'. Thomas Hobbes, "De Corpore Politico, or the Elements of Law," in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, ed. Sir William Molesworth, vol. 4 (London: John Bohn, 1840), 84.

[15] See, for instance, Deborah Baumgold, *Three-Text Edition of Thomas Hobbes's Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 127-40.

both works important and worth reading.[16] Having said that, there does seem to be an agreement that *Leviathan* makes various advances on the earlier works,[17] though it probably owes them more than it adds.[18] It is possible that at least some of these advances arose from *Leviathan*'s immediate context, which can be interpreted as a response to the gradual rise of Oliver Cromwell in the late 1640s.[19] In any case, while our focus is on *Leviathan*, we must keep in mind that there is an extended history of the work.

I aim to show that Hobbes mischaracterises his work, because he fails to fully understand the historical factors which have influenced him in writing it. Hobbes thinks of his ideal state as a general solution to the problem of disagreement, derived scientifically from his theory of human nature, but it is better read as a solution to particular local problems in his historical context. We touched on Hobbes's project in Chapter 2, for in order to confirm *Leviathan*'s status as a model of the ideal state, we needed to see how Hobbes describes what he is doing. Hobbes wants to provide a description of the commonwealth, which is 'but an artificial man, though of greater strength than the natural'. To do this, he needs to consider 'First, the *matter* thereof, and the *artificer*, both which is *man*' (Introduction, 1-2).[20] Once we understand human nature, we can construct an account of the commonwealth, because humans both constitute and create that commonwealth. Hobbes does not describe his expectations for his project in great detail at the beginning of *Leviathan*. In the dedicatory letter he compares his writing 'like to those simple and unpartial creatures in the Roman Capitol, that with their noise defended those within it, not because they were they, but there' (Letter Dedicatory), a reference to the Capitoline geese who saved Rome from invading Gauls by alerting guards to a stealth attack.[21] By so doing, Hobbes characterises himself as defending the commonwealth against enemies from within and without.[22] Halfway through *Leviathan*, Hobbes indicates that he has great aspirations for his work: 'I recover some hope that, one time or other, this writing of mine may fall into the hands of a sovereign who will consider it himself (for it is

---

[16] Schuhmann, "Leviathan and De Cive," 14.

[17] Tom Sorrell, "Introduction," in *Leviathan after 350 Years*, ed. Tom Sorrell and Luc Foisneau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1.

[18] Ibid., 2.

[19] Monicka Patterson-Tutschka, "Hobbes Smashes Cromwell and the Rump: An Interpretation of *Leviathan*," *Political Theory* 43, no. 5 (2015): 633.

[20] Hobbes is fond of using italics or capitalisation for emphasis. Unless otherwise noted, all such emphasis is Hobbes's.

[21] Kinch Hoekstra, "The De Facto Turn in Hobbes's Political Philosophy," in *Leviathan after 350 Years*, ed. Tom Sorrell and Luc Foisneau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 48.

[22] J. Matthew Hoye, "Obligation and Sovereign Virtue in Hobbes's *Leviathan*," *The Review of Politics* 79 (2017): 44.

short, and I think clear),[23] without the help of any interested or envious interpreter, and by the exercise of entire sovereignty in protecting the public teaching of it, convert this truth of speculation into the utility of practice' (xxxi, 41). Hobbes thinks of himself as defending or calling attention to the *true* arrangement of politics, based on a true understanding of human nature. We will explore how Hobbes thinks of his project in more depth when we consider his methods, but for the moment we turn to briefly see how some elements of Hobbes's thinking evolved between his earlier and later works.

Some of the changes in Hobbes's thinking between *Elements* and *Leviathan* might indicate a response to the changing political environment in which he lived. When *Elements* was written, in 1640, the civil war was two years away, and was neither expected nor desired by anybody. In 1651, when *Leviathan* was published, England was a republic; King Charles I had been executed in 1649. Whether Hobbes changed his mind because of the changing political context or because of purely intellectual reasons, perhaps seeking to respond to critics, is probably impossible to prove. However, it is worth noting that he did change his mind. One of the interesting developments which *Leviathan* makes on the earlier works is the way Hobbes thinks about democracy; he is much less hostile to democracy in *Leviathan* than he is in *Elements*.[24] In particular, the way Hobbes thinks about attributing an action to a body of people, saying that a group of individuals collectively *thinks* such-and-such, or that the group *does* such-and-such, and so on, has changed between the two works. In *Elements*, unanimity is required; an action cannot be attributed to a multitude 'unless every man's hand, and every man's will, (not so much as one excepted) have concurred thereto'.[25] In *Leviathan*, as we will see, a majority opinion seems to be enough.[26] This is worth mentioning because Hobbes does not make many comments in *Elements* about democracy specifically. Most of the time, he thinks, a democracy 'is no more than an aristocracy of orators, interrupted sometimes with the temporary monarchy of one orator'.[27] Given Hobbes's familiarity with

---

[23] As an aside, my edition of *Leviathan* runs to just under 500 pages, more than 100 pages longer than the next-longest contender, *Republic* (325 pages).

[24] Note that this is not a general discussion of Hobbes's political development between *Elements* and *Leviathan*; it does not include the important ideas of authorisation and representation introduced in the latter work. We will address those ideas later in this chapter.

[25] Hobbes, "Elements," 126.

[26] Though this allowance for majoritarianism only occurs once the commonwealth has been formed, and the commonwealth requires a unanimous covenant to begin with: the covenant 'of every man with every man' (xvii, 13).

[27] Ibid., 141.

Thucydides, this attitude is not surprising.[28] For Hobbes, democracy is an inherently unstable form of government which, unless it is quickly transformed into a more stable aristocracy or monarchy, will soon collapse.[29] In *Elements*, Hobbes compares aristocracy and monarchy, and has a definite preference for monarchy. He discusses the inconveniences of monarchical government, and in every case finds that an aristocratic government would be worse.[30] In *Leviathan* he does not pronounce definitely in favour of monarchy, though he seems to be able to find more disadvantages in democracy or aristocracy than in a monarchy.[31] The fact that Hobbes has changed his mind, or that his thinking appears to have evolved in the decade or so between writing *Elements* and *Leviathan*, could suggest that his hostility towards democracy has lessened somewhat, though his personal preference is still for monarchy.

We should take note of Hobbes's methods, as well, which epitomise the quasi-scientific approach to ideal state theory. Hobbes takes his project to follow a deductive method. Like René Descartes, Hobbes views himself as providing new foundations for philosophy; in his case, putting political philosophy on a scientific basis for the first time.[32] In so doing, Hobbes assumes that science and philosophy are essentially similar; they can use the same methods.[33] He had been much impressed by Euclid's demonstrative method, which deduced conclusions from self-evident premises. Hobbes later wrote that

> the science of every subject is derived from a precognition of the causes, generation, and construction of the same; and consequently where the causes are known, there is place for demonstration, but not where the causes are to seek for. Geometry therefore is demonstrable, for the lines and figures from which we reason are drawn and described by ourselves; and civil philosophy is demonstrable, because we make the commonwealth ourselves.[34]

---

[28] Hobbes himself credited Thucydides with inspiring his distrust of democracy. Maurice Pope, "Thucydides and Democracy," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 37, no. 3 (1988): 276.

[29] Alan Apperley, "Hobbes on Democracy," *Politics* 19, no. 3 (1999): 167.

[30] Hobbes, "Elements," 166ff.

[31] Tom Sorrell, "Hobbes, Locke and the State of Nature," in *Studies on Locke: Sources, Contemporaries, and Legacy*, ed. Sarah Hutton and Paul Schuurmann (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer, 2008), 32.

[32] Edwin Curley, *Introduction*, in Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, with Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), ix.

[33] David P Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan: The Moral and Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 3.

[34] Thomas Hobbes, "Six Lessons to the Savilian Professors of the Mathematics," in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, ed. Sir William Molesworth, vol. VII (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1845), 184.

For Hobbes, then, philosophy must proceed from first principles, like geometry does, and all fields of philosophy, including political philosophy, can be deduced from these first principles.[35]

Hobbes argues that geometry and 'civil philosophy'—politics—are both 'demonstrable', as we saw above. The idea of a demonstrative science comes from Aristotle; if something is demonstrative, it can be laid out as a series of demonstrations. Each demonstration's premises are either axioms—an indemonstrable first principle—or the conclusion of an earlier demonstration.[36] Euclid's geometry is a good example of a demonstrative science in this sense. But Aristotle denies that political science is demonstrative, as 'fine and just actions, which political science investigates, exhibit much variety and fluctuation, so that they may be thought to exist only by convention, and not by nature'.[37] Aristotle warns us to be careful, and to 'look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits: it is evidently equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician demonstrative proofs'.[38] That is, we should expect the appropriate kind of reasoning for any given field of enquiry, and not try to force another style of reasoning artificially—and politics, according to Aristotle, does not use demonstrative reasoning. Hobbes rejects this; on his mechanistic account politics *can* be demonstrated, just like geometry. He takes his axioms not from historical principles, but from human nature.[39] Hobbes found England full of people convinced that they knew the best way to run the state, and prepared to defend their conception of politics against all comers. The natural consequence of this was political disorder. For Hobbes, then, it was obvious that 'the salvation of society depended on the emergence of a political Euclid, who would demonstrate political truth beyond all possible doubt'.[40] Hobbes views himself as that political Euclid.

In order to understand Hobbes's ideal state, we need first to understand the state of nature, what we might describe as humanity's natural condition; the state of nature is the way humans would naturally organise themselves in the absence of a common authority, or a

---

[35] Eric Brandon, *The Coherence of Hobbes's Leviathan: Civil and Religious Authority Combined* (London: Continuum, 2007), 18.

[36] Jonathan Barnes, Introduction to Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, trans. Jonathan Barnes, Second ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), xviii.

[37] "Nicomachean Ethics," 1094b12-16.

[38] Ibid., 1094b26-27.

[39] Yves Charles Zarka, *Hobbes and Modern Political Thought*, trans. James Griffith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 36.

[40] Frederic Stewart McNeilly, *The Anatomy of Leviathan* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 8.

common power. The ideal state which Hobbes proposes is designed to protect its subjects from the state of nature as he envisages it. Once we have discussed the state of nature, we examine the lead-up to the English Civil War, guided by Hobbes's maxim that '*a kingdom divided in itself cannot stand*' (xviii, 16). This will help us to describe the local problem that Hobbes's ideal state resolves.

4.1 The State of Nature and the Nature of the State

The key contrast in Hobbes's political philosophy is between the ideal state, or civil society, and the state of nature. We cannot understand how Hobbes's ideal state works, and how it solves local problems, without first understanding the state of nature, and how Hobbes says civil society emerges from it. Hobbes designs his ideal state as a bulwark to protect its subjects from returning to the state of nature, which is 'the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe' (xiii, 8); it is, famously, a condition of war 'of every man against every man' (xiii, 8), a condition of great insecurity with no place for industry or agriculture, where life is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short' (xiii, 9). To those who might think this picture of the state of nature unlikely, Hobbes points out that people travel armed, lock their doors at night, and so on, even though they are in a society which has laws and people to enforce them (xiii, 10). Given the violent political turmoil of Hobbes's time, it is perhaps unsurprising that he came to hold the view that people, left unchecked, will inevitably turn violent towards one another.[41] The state of nature is not a state of continuous fighting, but the *threat* of violence is ever-present (xiii, 8). Hobbes makes an analogy with bad weather, which 'lieth not in a shower or two of rain, but in an inclination thereto of many days together' (xiii, 8). There can be no justice or injustice in the state of nature, for justice requires civil law, and civil law requires a common power (xiii, 13).[42]

The state of nature as Hobbes describes it almost certainly did not actually exist. But it does not need to have really existed in order to serve a useful purpose in Hobbes's model of the ideal state. The state of nature is a constant danger from which we need to be protected. Hobbes is not seeking to give a historical picture of how the English government under which

---

[41] Hampton, *Hobbes*, 5.

[42] This might look like quite a complex point, but Hobbes does not seem to think so. He says that 'the notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there [in the state of nature] no place' (xiii, 13). For Hobbes, justice is a quality which relates to people in society, and so it cannot exist outside civil society—i.e. in the state of nature.

he lived actually came to be,[43] so he writes about the state of nature without worrying about its historical accuracy.[44] Robert Ewin points out that Hobbes's contemporaries often took him to be making historical claims about an actual state of nature and an actual covenant, because other writers of the same period who spoke about the state of nature *were* making historical claims.[45] Hobbes comments that 'it may peradventure be thought, there was never such a time nor condition of war as this; and I believe it was never generally so, over all the world' (xiii, 11). He further comments that 'it may be perceived what manner of life there would be where there were no common power to fear, by the manner of life which men that have formerly lived under a peaceful government use to degenerate into, in a civil war' (xiii, 11). The state of nature is perhaps best understood as the condition of normally civilised people deprived of stable government.[46] It is the condition into which we are in danger of falling, were there no common power.[47] This danger is grounded in Hobbes's account of human nature. Left to their own devices, the natural equality of people would inevitably lead to conflict. Hobbes thinks that if dispute is possible, it will inevitably occur. From time to time even the 'most practiced men may deceive themselves and infer false conclusions'. We can sometimes take our own reasoning for 'right reason', but 'no one man's reason, nor the reason of any one number of men, makes the certainty, no more than an account is therefore well cast up, because a great many men have unanimously approved it'. Without a judge—whose reason is taken for right reason—set up to decide a disagreement, or a controversy as Hobbes calls it, it 'must either come to blows or be undecided, for want of a right reason constituted by nature, so is it also in all debates of what kind soever' (v, 3). In the state of nature, then, conflict arises when 'any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, [so] they become enemies; and . . . endeavour to destroy or subdue one another' (xiii, 3). Here again we can make an interesting comparison with Aristotle. He thinks that we want to institute the state in order to realise a good: *eudaimonia*, or human fulfilment. Hobbes says we actually want to institute the state in order to avoid a great evil: the state of nature. That the state of nature almost certainly never existed as Hobbes describes it need not worry us. What *is*

---

[43] R. E. Ewin, *Virtues and Rights: The Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991), 19.

[44] Alan Ryan, "Hobbes's Political Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. Tom Sorrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 217.

[45] Ewin, *Virtues*, 96. Ewin does not name those other writers, but he might be referring to people like Michel de Montaigne and Hugo Grotius. James J. Hamilton, "The Origins of Hobbes's State of Nature," *Hobbes Studies* 26 (2013): 154.

[46] Ryan, "Hobbes's Political Philosophy," 218.

[47] Ibid. This descent from civilisation into the state of nature is nicely illustrated by William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*.

important is that the state of nature is something from which we want to be protected, and that our desire for protection is what motivates us to covenant to form civil society.

Though the state of nature has no civil laws, that does not mean there are no laws of any kind. Hobbes describes twenty laws of nature, where a law of nature is 'a precept or general rule, found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do that which is destructive of his life or taketh away the means of preserving the same, and to omit that by which he thinketh it may be best preserved' (xiv, 3). The laws of nature are important underpinnings to the covenant which establishes the ideal state; we cannot get *out* of the state of nature except by using the laws of nature. Without these laws, the covenant—and hence the ideal state—is impossible.[48] The first three laws are of the greatest importance.[49] In the state of nature, every person has the right to self-preservation, and to undertake any action in pursuit of that goal (xiv, 1). This right means that every person effectively has a right to everything, even one another's body (xiv, 4). From this is derived the first of Hobbes's laws of nature, that '*every man ought to endeavour peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it*' (xiv, 4). If peace is not to be found, the right of nature affirms that we have the right '*by all means we can, to defend ourselves*' (xiv, 4). From the first law of nature is derived the second, '*that a man be willing, when others are so too, as far-forth as for peace and defence of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things, and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself*'. (xiv, 5). The third law of nature is the requirement '*that men perform the covenants made*' (xv, 1). Covenant is a transfer of rights; a mutual transfer of rights is called contract (xv, 9, 11). To covenant 'is to lay down a certain right, which is to assume an obligation'.[50] Covenants are binding, provided there is a common power over all contracting parties to enforce compliance. In the state of nature, a covenant can be rendered void 'upon any reasonable suspicion' (xiv, 18); a common power guarantees contracts by 'right and force sufficient to compel performance' (xiv, 18). Covenants entered into by fear or under duress are binding, even in the state of nature (xiv, 27).[51] Evidently fear does not constitute a 'reasonable suspicion'. For Hobbes, injustice is

---

[48] "Laws" is perhaps not the best term to use, though it is the term Hobbes uses. He offers another way of thinking about them which might be useful: 'the passions that incline men to peace are fear of death, desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living, and a hope by their industry to obtain them. And reason suggesteth convenient articles of peace, upon which may be drawn to agreement. These articles are they which otherwise are called the Laws of Nature' (xiii, 14).

[49] Jarosław Charchuła, "Hobbes's Theory of State. The Structure and Function of State as the Key to Its Enduring," *Forum Philosophicum* 15 (2010): 193.

[50] Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan: The Moral and Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, 41.

[51] Hobbes might mean *morally* binding, or morally obligatory here, rather than *legally* binding.

defined as '*the not performance of covenant*' (xv, 2). The laws of nature are immutable and eternal, for 'injustice, ingratitude, arrogance, pride, iniquity, acception of persons, and the rest, can never be made lawful' (xv, 38), and the 'science' of the laws of nature is 'the true and only philosophy' (xv, 40). The laws of nature can be summed up in the Golden Rule, the maxim '*Do not that to another, which thou wouldst not have done to thyself*' (xv, 35).[52] It has been suggested that the laws of nature in *Leviathan* are the source of normativity. For Hobbes, what makes something normative is that it is covered by the laws of nature.[53]

Another purpose which Hobbes's version of the state of nature serves is to show why political authority is justified, as most theories which rely on a state of nature do.[54] Hobbes uses the state of nature to show that life without a common authority or government is so terrible that we should avoid it at almost any cost.[55] He argues that the only way to avoid the state of nature is to follow the prescriptions of his political philosophy.[56] Accordingly, people covenant with one another to establish a near-absolute Sovereign,[57] who is responsible for their protection. Hobbes describes this covenant as 'the *only* way to erect such a common power as may be able to defend them [the people] from the invasion of foreigners and the injuries of one another' (xvii, 13, my emphasis). Thus, the state of nature dictates the nature of the state: absolutism is the bulwark to prevent us from sliding back into the state of nature.[58] This is why we needed to understand the state of nature before we could begin to describe the ideal state. Hobbes relies on fear of returning to the state of nature to motivate the subjects to keep their covenant of obedience, and the focus on fear plays an important part

---

[52] Hobbes would probably have known the Golden Rule from the Bible; Matthew 7:12 (KJV) is 'Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets'. It is perhaps interesting that Hobbes phrases the Golden Rule negatively, where the Bible phrases it positively. Augustine points out that a positive formulation of the Golden Rule can lead us into difficulties, as in the example of a man who is perfectly happy for others to commit adultery with his wife, and uses the Golden Rule to justify committing adultery with other men's wives. Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 4-5.

[53] Matthias Kiesselbach, "Hobbes's Struggle with Contractual Obligation. On the Status of the Laws of Nature in Hobbes's Work," *Hobbes Studies* 23 (2010): 112.

[54] Glen Newey, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hobbes and Leviathan* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 74.

[55] Hamilton, "Origins," 152. Hobbes thinks that there are some rights which we cannot surrender, and we talk more about these later.

[56] Ibid., 156.

[57] We encountered the Sovereign in Chapter 2; it is Rousseau's term for the legislature in his ideal state. The way Hobbes uses the term is much more familiar to us; the Sovereign for Hobbes is the near-absolute ruler of the ideal state.

[58] Stuart Sim and David Waller, *The Discourse of Sovereignty, Hobbes to Fielding: The State of Nature and the Nature of the State* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 13.

in *Leviathan*.[59] Interestingly, the state of nature can be seen as yet another departure from Aristotle. Tom Sorrell argues that Hobbes's state of nature repudiates Aristotle's description of people as political animals (*zoon politikon*). While Aristotle thinks that people are naturally suited to live socially, Hobbes does not. The state, then, artificially suppresses the state of nature—the way people are naturally disposed to behave.[60] We will have more to say on the role of the Sovereign and the near-absolute nature of their power later.

In order for Hobbes's ideal state to be the best defence against falling into the state of nature, he has to demonstrate that there can be no alternative: politics must be a dichotomy of either the state of nature or civil society as Hobbes presents it. Eric Brandon argues that, for Hobbes, the Sovereign is either absolute (or near-absolute) and possesses all relevant power, or they are not truly the Sovereign, in which case they cannot be a common power and we are still in the state of nature.[61] For Hobbes, the purpose of the state is collective and mutual security. He is surely aware that other purposes of the state have been proposed by earlier philosophers—Aristotle's mutual flourishing, for instance—but he denies that, say, mutual flourishing is enough to motivate us to form civil society—though he does not attack Aristotle explicitly.[62] Hobbes says that the 'final cause, end, or design of men . . . in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves in which we see them live in commonwealths is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of war [the state of nature]' (xvii, 1).[63] Covenants 'without the sword are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all' (xvii, 2). The argument Hobbes makes for absolute submission requires us to believe that war is necessarily awful, and that anything short of leaving all judgements about security to the Sovereign is either warlike behaviour, or behaviour that is likely to provoke war.[64] Both these claims, Sorrel notes, could be disputed. The central point is that, for Hobbes, the only possibility is the absolute sovereign or the state of nature; there are no alternatives.

---

[59] Ryan, "Hobbes's Political Philosophy," 225.
[60] Sorrell, "Hobbes, Locke and the State of Nature," 29.
[61] Brandon, *Coherence*, 32.
[62] Sorrell, "Hobbes, Locke and the State of Nature," 29.
[63] It is interesting (and somewhat puzzling), given Hobbes's rejection of Aristotle, that he chooses to begin this chapter in Aristotelian language. Hobbes rejects the notion of a final cause. The language of a final cause is absent from the equivalent sections of *Elements* and *De Cive*, as Baumgold shows. Baumgold, *Three-Text Hobbes*, 215-16.
[64] Sorrell, "Hobbes, Locke and the State of Nature," 33.

4.2 King and Parliament: Sovereignty in England

In the state of nature, disagreement leads almost inevitably to violence. As we have seen, Hobbes thinks that if disagreement is possible, it will occur. In his ideal state, he aims to make disagreement as close to impossible as he can. But he is not concerned with all disagreement; he wants to eliminate those disagreements in which there is no judge, or nobody to arbitrate. This element of Hobbes's ideal state is motivated by and directed against particular local problems. In his historical context there were serious disagreements with no universally-accepted judge who could resolve them. Hobbes think he can make these kinds of disagreements impossible. We turn now to the historical context within which Hobbes constructed his ideal state, to see what the disagreements were. In this connection, Hobbes makes some interesting and revealing comments in *Leviathan*. In the Introduction, Hobbes, comparing features of the natural body with those of the artificial body of the commonwealth, equates civil war with death. Scattered through the text he makes at least four explicit references to the Civil War or preceding events. Hobbes asserts that if there had not been a general opinion that the sovereign power was divided between the King and the two Houses of Parliament, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons, 'the people had never been divided and fallen into this civil war' (xviii, 16). Later, he remarks that 'where there is already erected a sovereign power, there can be no other representative of the same people, but only to certain particular ends, by the sovereign limited' (xix, 3). Hobbes laments that

> I know not how this, so manifest a truth, should of late be so little observed that in a monarchy, he that had the sovereignty from a descent of 600 years,[65] was alone called sovereign, had the title of Majesty from every one of his subjects, and was unquestionably taken by them for their king, was notwithstanding never considered as their representative, that name without contradiction passing for the title of those men which at his command were sent up by the people to carry their petitions, and give him (if he permitted it) their advice (xix, 3).

Towards the end of *Leviathan*, in the Review and Conclusion (R&C), Hobbes comments that 'because I find . . . *that the civil wars have not yet sufficiently taught men* in what point of time it is that a subject becomes obliged to the conqueror . . . therefore, for further satisfaction of men therein, I say the point of time wherein a man becomes subject to a conqueror is that point wherein, having liberty to submit to him, he consenteth . . . to be his subject' (R&C, 6, my emphasis). Finally, he signs off the work by saying: 'And thus I have

---

[65] It is not clear where Hobbes gets this number from. Taking 1066 and the ascension of William the Conqueror as the starting point, 1649—the year of Charles I's death—gives 583 years. Perhaps Hobbes is just being generous in his rounding.

brought to an end my Discourse of Civil and Ecclesiastical Government, occasioned by the disorders of the present time' (R&C, 17). Of these four comments, the first two are the most important, as we will see later. Indeed, about five years after *Leviathan* was published, Hobbes wrote that 'the cause of my writing that book [*Leviathan*], was the consideration of what the ministers before, and in the beginning of, the civil war, by their preaching and writing did contribute thereunto'.[66] These comments suggest that the civil war, and civil discord more generally, are very much on Hobbes's mind in *Leviathan*. These comments all fit nicely with Hobbes's conception of his project as a scientific one. For Hobbes, the civil war was the ultimate consequence of his theory. Human nature shows us that people will inevitably disagree, and if there is nobody to resolve the disagreement violence is all but inevitable. That this occurred in England is evidence that Hobbes's analysis is correct; given that the ideal state in *Leviathan* is a general solution to the problem of disagreement, we would naturally expect it to be able to resolve disagreements in England. But it is in fact the other way around: the ideal state's structure is designed to avoid the particular kinds of disagreements which Hobbes observed in England, and these disagreements led to civil war.

The local problem which Hobbes's model of the ideal state solves is the power struggles between King Charles I and parliament in pre-Civil War England, leading up to the outbreak of war in 1642. Before we go on, we should note that the following discussion is not intended by any means to be a comprehensive analysis of the causes or course of the English Revolution. Not least because the Revolution is highly complex, and the brief discussion here cannot hope to capture the full scale of that complexity. Accordingly, the following is in many ways a simplified picture of the political and constitutional struggle in England. I have picked out points which seem to me to be most significant, and against which it seems that Hobbes is reacting. Of necessity, therefore, much is left out. The end-point for our discussion is the beginning of the civil war, in summer 1642. We do not need to examine the events of the war itself in depth; civil war is the consequence of the local problem, but it is not the problem itself. An important feature of the ideal state that Hobbes constructs in *Leviathan* is that civil war is impossible. Another important feature of Hobbes's model of the ideal state, which will help us to identify and describe the local problem, is his insistence that the sovereign power is necessarily indivisible, for '*a kingdom divided in itself cannot stand*' (xviii, 16). Accordingly, we are looking for whether—and how—England was a divided

---

[66] Hobbes, "Six Lessons," 335.

kingdom. We start by introducing the major players, King Charles I and his various Parliaments. We then examine some key issues, looking for the major fracture lines between the king and parliament: both claimed to possess sovereign power, and both claimed to be the true representative of the English people in the sense Hobbes uses the term in *Leviathan*.

4.2.1 Main Players: King Charles I and his Parliaments

The personality of the king is one important factor in understanding the origins of the English Civil Wars. King Charles I ruled three kingdoms—England, Scotland, and Ireland—which had different legal systems and faced different problems.[67] Managing these differences called for tact, insight, and dedication. Unfortunately, Charles was deficient in all but the last of these qualities.[68] The king was not stupid, despite the claims of some historians,[69] but he was narrow-minded, inflexible, and did not have the imaginative capacity to foresee the results of his decisions or to gauge their effect on others.[70] Charles believed that his rule was divinely sanctioned, and behaved as though his actions were, too. As a result he would often not explain his policies to those he had to work with,[71] which damaged their trust in him.[72] Most serious, though, was his lack of insight into personal motivations and his 'fatally weak' sense of what was politically possible.[73] The king's personal failings played no small role in the breakdown of functional government in England.[74]

Charles had a fractious relationship with his parliaments which formed a major fracture line in the period before the civil wars. The seventeenth-century parliament was not a permanent body. Parliament had three traditional tasks: to vote taxes, to propose or vet legislation, and to offer advice to the monarch.[75] Charles called three parliaments in the first four years of his

---

[67] These are separate countries, held in personal union. A modern example is Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, which all have the same Head of State but are not one country. Ireland was not fully independent, but England and Scotland were separate.

[68] Austin Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution, 1625-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 49.

[69] Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution, 1603-1714*, Second ed. (Wokingham: Van Nostrand Reinhold (UK), 1980), 61.

[70] Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 50.

[71] Martyn Bennett, *The Civil Wars in Britain and Ireland, 1638-1651* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 25.

[72] Worden, *Civil Wars*, 7.

[73] Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 52.

[74] Hobbes, in *Behemoth*, is much kinder than modern historians have been—perhaps unsurprisingly, given that he wanted Charles II's permission to publish it. Hobbes describes Charles I as 'a man that wanted no virtue, either of body or mind, nor endeavoured anything more than to discharge his duty towards God, in the well governing of his subjects'. Hobbes, "Behemoth," 166.

[75] Worden, *Civil Wars*, 16.

reign, all of which ended acrimoniously.[76] After dissolving his third parliament in 1629, Charles chose not to summon another; the period between this parliament and the Short Parliament of 1640 is known as the personal rule. It is worth noting that Charles was not opposed to parliaments in principle; he called parliaments in Scotland in 1633 and in Ireland in 1634-35. The key point is that the Scottish and Irish parliaments were ones the king felt he could control.[77] During the 1630s, when no English parliaments were called, Charles and his advisors employed a number of ingenious methods to raise the necessary revenue to fund the government, most of which would be later declared illegal by the Long Parliament.[78] A religious and political crisis in Scotland precipitated a brief war, after which the king's treasury was exhausted. Charles was therefore forced to summon a new parliament in order to raise the necessary funds to resume the war with the Scots. This parliament met for the first time on 13 April 1640,[79] but it sat for only three weeks before the king dissolved it, earning it the name the Short Parliament. But, the need for funds having become even more urgent, Charles summoned another parliament to convene in November 1640. This parliament sat, on and off, for twenty years before being dissolved in March 1660; it has since been labelled the Long Parliament. We will see that both sides claimed, with some legitimacy, to hold important powers, and that their differing expectations and inability to resolve disagreements led to a breakdown of functional government.

4.2.2 Fiscal Factors

England's fiscal system was woefully inadequate, and its inadequacies were a major sticking point between the king and parliament, in no small part contributing to the breakdown of government. There had been a long period of inflation which had long since outpaced Crown revenues,[80] and the whole fiscal system was well overdue for an overhaul.[81] Control of the purse strings had been delegated to parliament; from the early fifteenth century money bills had originated in parliament rather than with the Crown.[82] In 1628, Charles's third parliament managed to persuade the king to accept the Petition of Right, which stated, among other

---

[76] Ibid., 19.
[77] Tim Harris, "Revisiting the Causes of the English Civil War," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (2015): 623.
[78] Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 65.
[79] Ibid., 130.
[80] Worden, *Civil Wars*, 17. Incidentally, this long inflation was just beginning when More has Hythloday blame the increased crime rate on rising food prices in *Utopia* (U: 19).
[81] Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 17.
[82] Trevor Royle, *Civil War: The Wars of the Three Kingdoms, 1638-1660* (London: Little, Brown, 2004), 19.

things, that no tax could be levied without parliament's consent.[83] This principle of parliamentary consent to taxation has ancient origins, dating from the Magna Carta of 1215.[84] Parliament's control of funds was a considerable obstacle to the king's ambitions.

During the personal rule, 1629-1640, Charles and his advisors resorted to a number of expedients to raise revenue without having to call a parliament; a perhaps inevitable response to parliamentary parsimony.[85] These financial expedients were the focus of a power struggle between the king and parliament. The most famous—or notorious—of them was Ship Money, which was collected annually from 1634. Since Plantagenet times the Crown had, in times of emergency, required the ports and maritime counties of England to furnish ships for the navy or, failing that, to provide money in lieu of a ship. Charles's innovation was to extend the levy to inland counties as well.[86] It was hard to argue against this extension, as the ships provided protected the whole country.[87] In 1637, John Hampden was brought to trial for refusing to pay his share of Ship Money. Hampden, one of the richest squires in Buckinghamshire, had been required to pay a share of £1; the total sum the king demanded was a little under £200,000.[88] Woolrych notes wryly that 'the gentry were as usual grossly under-assessed'.[89] The issue at hand in Hampden's trial was the same as had been of importance in another major case a decade earlier:[90] the Crown claimed to hold emergency powers of taxation, and further claimed to be the judge of whether or not there was an emergency.[91] The Ship Money case raised the question of whether there were any limits to the king's power; his normal powers could be exceeded in an emergency, and it was the king's judgement which determined whether or not an emergency existed.[92] These and other arguments, it should be noted, were about what the king could and could not do within the existing system, not about whether the system itself was right or wrong.[93] Ship Money was important, because if it could have been established as a regular tax which the king could

---

[83] J.P. Kenyon, ed., *The Stuart Constitution 1603-1688: Documents and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 68.

[84] Robert Blackburn, "Magna Carta and the Development of the British Constitution," *The Historian*, no. 125 (2015): 28.

[85] Worden, *Civil Wars*, 18.

[86] Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 67.

[87] Worden, *Civil Wars*, 25-26.

[88] Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 68-69.

[89] Ibid., 69.

[90] In 1627, five knights refused to pay a forced loan levied by the king, and were imprisoned by royal command; they failed to secure release after suing for a writ of habeas corpus.

[91] Worden, *Civil Wars*, 26.

[92] Malcolm, "Summary Biography," 27.

[93] Harris, "Revisiting," 622.

collect without parliamentary consent, then the fundamental constitutional issue of the day would have been decided in the monarchy's favour.[94] Hampden's trial, incidentally, seems to have contributed to popular resistance to Ship Money; in 1637 ninety percent of the sum demanded had been paid,[95] the following year some sixty-one percent went unpaid.[96] Ship Money, and the other financial expedients the king resorted to during the personal rule, was a major grievance which would be addressed by parliament when it was eventually summoned again.

4.2.3 Religious Issues

In our own day, we are accustomed to the separation of Church and State, but 'it is unwise to separate the temporal from the spiritual in early modern England'.[97] The importance of religion cannot be overstated. The Church played a much larger part in people's lives during the seventeenth century than it does today.[98] Religion and Church government were important, even in areas which today we would not regard as religious. Significantly, the Civil War was at least partly caused by *both* religious and political issues. Both had been brewing for a long time, but it was Charles who brought them together.[99] For space reasons, this section is necessarily brief, and accordingly it provides a simplified picture of the religious issues which, at the time, were highly contentious and of great importance. The key division was whether or not the king had the power to decide religious issues, and to what extent he could require religious conformity in his kingdoms.

We should begin by clarifying some religious terms. In defining them, we are seeking not to establish their doctrinal or spiritual differences, but their distinctions in *political* terms. Further, these are not seventeenth-century terms—or their meaning has changed since the seventeenth century—so we are seeking to understand how they are used in secondary literature. Broadly, we are interested in the difference between Anglicanism on the one hand, and Puritanism on the other.

---

[94] Hill, *Century*, 46.
[95] Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 68.
[96] Hill, *Century*, 46.
[97] Edward Vallance, "Preaching to the Converted: Religious Justifications for the English Civil War," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65, no. 3/4 (2002): 398.
[98] Hill, *Century*, 63.
[99] Worden, *Civil Wars*, 8.

Anglicanism, in a nutshell, is the view that the power to determine Church doctrine and to administer Church government rests ultimately with the civil sovereign, and not with any ecclesiastical body.[100] Anglicans hold that every state should have one uniform Church and method of worship, the rites and ceremonies of which are to be instituted by the authority of the monarch as supreme head of the Church.[101] The English Church was a curious mix; it used bishops to organise and control the Church, preserving a Catholic structure while at the same time absorbing Calvinist theology.[102]

In the seventeenth century, the term "Puritan" was derogatory. Those who found themselves subjected to it usually preferred to think of themselves as "godly".[103] Yet, as Blair Worden points out, the term usefully encapsulates a movement. Anglicans generally viewed the Reformation as having gone far enough, or indeed having gone too far. For Puritans, the Reformation had not gone far enough and there was more to be done.[104] The distinction between Anglicanism and Puritanism is, it should be stressed, a major simplification of a number of different doctrinal positions. But it is a useful simplification, to help us understand the basic religious positions which impact on the events in which we are interested.

There seems to be a growing consensus that religion was the prime factor in causing the Civil Wars; political thought and constitutional grievances were secondary factors.[105] A leading cause of the civil wars was the belief that the Anglican authorities had oppressed Puritans during the 1630s, forcing them to worship with ceremonies they thought to be blasphemous.[106] John Morrill argues we should view the English Revolution not as the first of the European revolutions, but as the last of the Wars of Religion.[107] Jeffrey Collins agrees; arguing that the civil war was recognised as largely a war of religion, as 'soon as its first shots were fired. The importance of religion in explaining the conflict has remained a staple of historical interpretation ever since'.[108]

---

[100] D. Alan Orr, "Sovereignty, Supremacy and the Origins of the English Civil War," *History* 87, no. 288 (2002): 480.

[101] Johann Sommerville, "*Leviathan* and Its Anglican Context," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's Leviathan*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 359.

[102] Worden, *Civil Wars*, 8.

[103] Ibid., 9.

[104] Ibid., 11.

[105] Vallance, "Religious Justifications," 395.

[106] Sommerville, "Anglican Context," 360-61.

[107] John Morrill, "The Religious Context of the English Civil War," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 34 (1984): 178.

[108] Collins, *Allegiance*, 69.

One source of religious conflict was a series of innovations masterminded by Charles and William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1633. This aspect of the personal rule is 'the hardest to assess, yet probably the most important to understand'.[109] During the personal rule, Charles appeared to sanction controversial church reforms, such as replacing communion tables with altars.[110] One significant feature of the Laudian church is an emphasis on conformity, in contrast to the laissez-faire approach to diversity of worship which had been the norm during James I's reign.[111] Another feature is the attempt to invest worship, and especially the celebration of the sacraments, 'with a reverent ritual and priest-like vestments'.[112] In our own day these policies may strike many of us as unobjectionable, even admirable, but we must bear in mind how they struck contemporaries, who saw them against the background of the strongly Protestant church which had held sway since the English Reformation, as well as in comparison with the bloody wars in Europe.[113] There was a strong feeling that idolatry and popery—a derogatory term for Catholicism—were being allowed to creep back into the Church of England, and this trend must be resisted. Indeed, Morrill argues that 'it is almost impossible to overestimate the damage caused by the Laudians'.[114] The attempts to establish greater religious conformity across the three kingdoms was a major division between the king and his people; religious issues are an important aspect of the local problem which Hobbes solves. Woolrych argues that religion was not the foremost of the issues which sparked the Civil War, but religious convictions had a significant impact on which side people chose when war eventually came.[115] He does note that religion was the prime cause of the Scottish and Irish rebellions in 1638 and 1641 respectively.[116] Accordingly, it is to Scotland and Ireland that we now turn.

4.2.4 Scotland and Ireland

The rebellions in Scotland and Ireland caused major damage to Charles's regime. The wars with the Scots emptied the treasury, forcing the king to summon parliament to grant him

---

[109] Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 75.
[110] Charles W.A. Prior, "Religion, Political Thought and the English Civil War," *History Compass* 11, no. 1 (2013): 25-26.
[111] Worden, *Civil Wars*, 24.
[112] Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 77.
[113] Ibid., 83.
[114] Morrill, "Religious Context," 162.
[115] Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 31.
[116] Ibid.

more funds. The rebellion in Ireland created the final division between Charles and parliament which led directly and inexorably to civil war. In Scotland, Charles 'committed political suicide',[117] due to his religious reforms, which backfired catastrophically. To describe in detail the differences between the English and Scottish Churches would require more space than we can devote to it. In a nutshell, though, the traditions of the Scottish Kirk—the Presbyterian Church of Scotland—were more Calvinist than the English church, and clashed with the king's preference for more ceremonial rituals, which as we saw had strongly Catholic associations.[118] Presbyterians standardly held that the Church ought to be governed by a council of elected officials—rejecting the episcopal structure of the Church of England. In Church affairs, the General Assembly, which governed the Kirk, was superior to the monarch, and could give him binding instructions.[119] The Scottish Presbyterians were readier than the English to call their kings to account,[120] though it took a fairly strong provocation to push them into revolt. In an effort to bring his three kingdoms into greater religious conformity, Charles imposed a new Prayer Book on the Scots, which bore close resemblance to the English version.[121] The Scots went into revolt, and formed the National Covenant, which affirmed a commitment to the Scottish form of worship. The Covenanters proclaimed their loyalty to the king, but indicated that this loyalty was contingent on the king's observance of Scottish law.[122] Charles raised an army to put down the revolt, only to find that the Scots had raised a stronger one. The war had been funded by the crown, but emptied the treasury. Resistance to continued taxation was also growing, as we saw with Ship Money. Several of the king's supporters pushed for him to summon a parliament—which he had not done for eleven years—to provide the funds he needed and to legitimise his war plans and taxation policy.[123] Thus the personal rule was brought to an end by the summoning of the Short Parliament, which met for the first time in April 1640, and lasted only three weeks before being dissolved without having granted any funds. Undeterred, the king pressed on, though the Earl of Bristol told Charles in early June that most of the lords present in the king's camp—including a number of privy councillors—intended to formally petition for a

---

[117] Worden, *Civil Wars*, 26.

[118] Norah Carlin, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 16.

[119] Sommerville, "Anglican Context," 360.

[120] Worden, *Civil Wars*, 28.

[121] Ibid., 27.

[122] Ibid., 28. Worden notes that, under the new Book of Common Prayer, Scottish forms of worship would be forced to yield to 'alien set forms and to a sacerdotal eucharist. New powers given to the bishops threatened the Presbyterian structure of the Church'.

[123] Bennett, *Civil Wars*, 51.

parliament.[124] Aware that a military defeat would probably force him to summon parliament, Charles resolved on a treaty to buy time.[125] The first of the Bishops' Wars,[126] as they became known, ended with a truce at Berwick in June 1640. During the spring and summer of 1640, the king sought to raise another army.[127] In August, the Scots invaded England, routed the English at Newburn, and occupied Newcastle.[128] An agreement between Charles and the Scots obliged the king to abandon his ecclesiastical policy in Scotland and, more urgently, to meet the occupying army's costs until a treaty was signed,[129] some £850 per day.[130] Charles's options were exhausted: he had no choice but to summon another parliament, known to history as the Long Parliament.

The rebellion in Ireland broke out in October 1641, provoked at least in part by the fall of the Earl of Strafford who had been 'the glue which held Ireland together'.[131] Strafford had run Charles's government in Ireland from 1633. He returned to England in 1639, where he was impeached by the Long Parliament;[132] his fall left a power vacuum, which Irish rebels thought they could fill.[133] In Ireland, about three-quarters of the population were Catholic,[134] and feared that the anti-Catholic sentiment of England and Scotland would result in their religion being driven from the land. After Strafford's fall, Catholic leaders took advantage of the instability to stage an uprising, which quickly flared out of control.[135] In Ulster, the northern province, about one in five Protestants were killed.[136] The Irish rebellion was the context in which the triggering issues of the wars was debated: control of the armed forces. We will examine that below, but first we turn to the Short Parliament.

4.2.5 The Short Parliament

The Short Parliament, which lasted from 13 April to 5 May 1640, offers a useful snapshot of the differing expectations of the king and his parliament; these differing expectations, set

---

[124] Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 121-22.
[125] Ibid., 122.
[126] So named because the Covenanters rejected episcopal authority.
[127] Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 140.
[128] Worden, *Civil Wars*, 29.
[129] Ibid., 30.
[130] Royle, *Civil War*, 115.
[131] Ibid., 133.
[132] Worden, *Civil Wars*, 29.
[133] Ibid., 35.
[134] Ibid., 34.
[135] Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 196.
[136] Worden, *Civil Wars*, 36.

against the background assumption that each party was in the right, led to a breakdown in government. While Charles expected parliament to simply vote him the funds he required to resume the war against the Scots, the Commons held the view that until "the liberties of the House and kingdom be cleared they knew not whether they had anything to give or no".[137] It was inconceivable that parliament would vote the king the million or so pounds he needed for his war against the Scots without securing redress for at least the major grievances which had been piling up for the last decade.[138] John Pym addressed the Commons on 17 April outlining those grievances, which 'may be reduced to three heads. The first are those grievances which during these eleven years' interval of parliaments are against the liberties and privileges of parliament. The second are innovations in matters of religion. The third, grievances against the propriety of our goods'.[139] In the first category, Pym protested that the previous parliament, of 1629, had been dissolved before its grievances had been redressed, or even fully heard. In the second category, Pym protested 'divers innovations in religion', which included 'the introducing of popish ceremonies, as altars, bowing towards the east, pictures, crosses, crucifixes and the like, which of themselves considered, are so many dry bones, but being put together make the man'.[140] The final category was a protest at many, if not all, of the financial expedients of the personal rule, including collecting customs duties without parliamentary consent, and Ship Money. On 4 May Charles offered to give up Ship Money, in exchange for twelve subsidies—an unprecedented number—but parliament was reluctant, precisely because the sum was unprecedented and the king's concession relatively minimal. Some 'tried to add other concessions to the price ticket',[141] so the king dissolved parliament the following day, which only increased opposition to taxation and war preparations.[142] Austin Woolrych suggests that had the king offered to drop Ship Money on the first day of the Short Parliament rather than its penultimate day, he may have got the subsidies he wanted.[143] Indeed, Trevor Royle argues that parliament was prepared to grant the subsidies the king required, but not until some action had been taken to address their concerns about the king's policies.[144] As it was, the differing expectations of king and parliament resulted in no funds being voted for the king, and no grievances being redressed for the parliament.

---

[137] Quoted in ibid., 29.
[138] Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 129.
[139] Kenyon, *Stuart Constitution*, 183-84.
[140] Ibid., 185-86.
[141] Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 137.
[142] Bennett, *Civil Wars*, 58.
[143] Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 138.
[144] Royle, *Civil War*, 106.

4.2.6 The Militia Ordinance and the Nineteen Propositions

Our final theme to discuss is the spark that lit the powder keg; these are the issues which made civil war unavoidable. The mutual distrust between the king and parliament had made functional government all but impossible. Parliament was understandably reluctant to raise an army in Ireland and put it under Charles's control, for fear it would then be turned against them.[145] The Irish rebellion had convinced many parliamentarians that defence could no longer be left to the king.[146] Taken with the so-called army plot of summer 1641, when supporters of the king allegedly planned to bring the army south from York to threaten parliament, this was enough to convince parliament that they needed to exercise a greater level of control over the armed forces. To this end, the Commons proposed the Militia Bill in March 1642,[147] which gave control of the county militias to officers appointed by parliament. The king refused to sign this Bill, so parliament passed it as an ordinance rather than an Act. 'No one quarrel led so inexorably to war' as that over the Militia Ordinance.[148] The final straw, though, was the Nineteen Propositions, which were issued on 1 June 1642. These were effectively 'a demand for the king's unconditional surrender'. The Propositions gave parliament the right to appoint ministers, royal advisers, and even those responsible for educating the king's children. They further required the king to accept the Militia Ordinance, and gave parliament a greater role in Church governance.[149] Unsurprisingly, Charles rejected these proposals.

4.3 A Kingdom Divided and Hobbes's *Leviathan*

Earlier, I noted that Hobbes makes at least four explicit references to the Civil War in *Leviathan*. The first two of these references are the most significant. Hobbes claims that had the opinion not existed that the sovereign power in England was divided between the King, Lords, and Commons, the Civil War would never have happened. Later, he declares that there can only ever be one representative of a people, in the sense he is using the term in *Leviathan*, and he rejects the claim that the English parliament could be considered the representative of

---

[145] Ibid., 140.
[146] Carlin, *Causes*, 32.
[147] Warren E. Spehar, "The Militia Ordinance of 1642 and the 14th-Century Great Statute of *Praemunire*," *Parliamentary History* 35, no. 2 (2016): 111.
[148] Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 215.
[149] Royle, *Civil War*, 164-65.

the people; Hobbes considers parliament to be a body set up to express grievances to the king, and to offer deferential advice. These two features, the division of sovereign power and Hobbes's theory of representation, allow us to see how Hobbes's ideal state solves the local problems he identifies. Hobbes thinks that his ideal state is a general solution to the problem of disagreement, logically derived from human nature as he describes it, but he does not recognise that the ideal state also responds to important local issues. The problem, as Hobbes sees it, lies in the belief that sovereignty was, or could be, shared between the king and parliament, and that parliament could meaningfully be considered the people's representative in the sense Hobbes uses the term in *Leviathan*. His solution is to construct an ideal state in which the rights and powers of sovereignty are indivisible, and to posit a theory of representation such that there cannot be confusion as to who is the true representative of the people.

To see how Hobbes conceives of the powers and office of sovereignty, we should start by seeing how he conceives of the Sovereign. It is worth noting that the Sovereign does not have to be a single individual. Hobbes is at pains to remind his readers that the Sovereign could be a single person or an assembly, either an assembly of all (a democracy), or of a part (an aristocracy).[150] The ideal state, therefore, need not be a monarchy. Though, as we noted earlier, Hobbes claims to be even-handed in his preference for a monarchy or an assembly as Sovereign, he is always able to find more disadvantages to assembly rule than to rule by a single individual.[151] When considering the Sovereign, and the person or persons who hold the sovereign power, we are thinking of the office of government, the 'legal person' of the Sovereign, as opposed to the individual or individuals who inhabit the office.[152]

The possibility of a sovereign assembly raises several questions for us, particularly about how such an assembly meshes with Hobbes's theory of representation. We will deal with those questions when we talk about representation, but one question which we can address now is what happens if the members of an assembly do not agree unanimously on a position, and

---

[150] Once again *contra* Aristotle, Hobbes only allows these three categories. Aristotle identifies six, one good and one bad—monarchy opposed to tyranny, for example. Hobbes holds that the negative forms 'are not the names of other forms of government, but of the same forms misliked' (xix, 2). That is, if we live in a monarchy which we do not think is good, we call it a tyranny—but it is not a different form of government on Hobbes's account. Aristotle, "Politics," 1279a30-79b10.

[151] Sorrell, "Hobbes, Locke and the State of Nature," 32.

[152] Christine Chwaszcza, "The Seat of Sovereignty: Hobbes on the Artificial Person of the Commonwealth or State," *Hobbes Studies* 25 (2012): 124.

how the dispute is to be resolved. Hobbes says that 'if the representative consist of many men, the voice of the greater number must be considered as the voice of them all' (xvi, 15).[153] This seems to be straightforwardly majoritarian; the whole agrees to be bound by the majority decision. Hobbes does not get into procedural details, like how a vote is to be taken—by voice, show of hands, secret ballot, and so on—nor does he answer questions about what happens if the vote itself is disputed. The closest he gets is a comment that an even-numbered assembly is 'oftentimes mute and incapable of action' (xvi, 16). This suggests that a group decision requires a clear majority, and if it does not have one, the group representative cannot be said to will anything on the subject in question. Whether Hobbes would resolve the dispute by additional voting, or by some other method, is not clear. But, we should not expect him to go into such detail; *Leviathan* is not a blueprint, as we discussed in Chapter 1. In the case of a sovereign assembly, a majority vote does not bind the assembly as anything they decide to do can always be undone by a later majority.[154] The Sovereign is not subject to the civil laws, because they can make new laws when they please (xxvi, 6).

It is important to note that the Sovereign's powers, though broad, are not unlimited. Hobbes tells us that 'every subject has liberty in all those things the right whereof cannot by covenant be transferred' (xxi, 11). The right of self-preservation cannot be surrendered to the Sovereign, because it is self-preservation which motivates us to make the covenant in the first place. We cannot give up the very right we are trying to protect. To put this another way, by surrendering our rights to the Sovereign, we place limits on our natural freedom in exchange for security. But we cannot surrender our freedom *totally*, because doing so would leave us as insecure as we were before, at no benefit to ourselves. Thus, a subject cannot be ordered to commit suicide, or to incriminate themselves, and may, in certain limited circumstances, refuse 'to execute any dangerous office', provided the refusal does not frustrate 'the end for which the sovereignty was ordained' (xxi, 15). All other cases depend on the silence of the law. Where the Sovereign has prescribed no rule, each subject may act according to their own discretion (xxi, 18). This might imply that while Hobbes's ideal sovereign would be absolute in principle, in practice they would be indistinguishable from a constitutional sovereign.[155]

---

[153] Recall that this is an evolution from Hobbes's original argument, in *Elements*, that a group decision must be unanimous.

[154] Sean Fleming, "The Two Faces of Personhood: Hobbes, Corporate Agency and the Personality of the State," *European Journal of Political Theory* **20**, no. 1 (2021).

[155] Ryan, "Hobbes's Political Philosophy," 232.

The rights Hobbes gives here, though, are a far cry from the liberal constitutionalist standards of freedom of the press, of religion, of assembly, and so on.

The most important point to note about the Sovereign's powers is that they are, as Hobbes says, 'incommunicable and inseparable'. Hobbes notes that

> The power to coin money, to dispose of the estate and persons of infant heirs, to have preemption in markets, and all other statute prerogatives may be transferred by the sovereign, and yet the power to protect his subjects be retained. But if he transfer the *militia*, he retains the judicature in vain, for want of execution of the laws; or if he grant away the power of raising money, the *militia* is in vain; or if he give away the government of doctrines, men will be frighted into rebellion with the fear of spirits. And so if we consider any one of the said rights, we shall presently see, that the holding of all the rest will produce no effect, in the conservation of peace and justice, the end for which all commonwealth are instituted. And this division is it, whereof it is said *a kingdom divided in itself cannot stand* (xviii, 16).[156]

The Sovereign can presumably delegate any responsibility which is not part of what Hobbes calls 'the rights which make the essence of sovereignty' (xviii, 16). Exactly to whom responsibilities are delegated probably depends on the nature of the Sovereign; a monarch might choose to appoint officers, an assembly might appoint committees made up of its own members. Hobbes does not say. Earlier, we saw that Hobbes argues that either we accept his ideal state or we are doomed to the state of nature, there are no alternatives. The Sovereign's key responsibility is to protect their subjects. This is what Hobbes means by 'a kingdom divided in itself cannot stand'; the sovereign power has to remain undivided in order for the Sovereign to be able to effectively protect their subjects. This impacts on the Ship Money case we discussed earlier. As we saw, the issue at stake in that case was the fact that the king's ordinary powers could be exceeded in an emergency, and that the king could decide whether or not an emergency existed. For the Hobbesian Sovereign, the question does not arise: the Sovereign's ultimate responsibility is to protect their subjects, and they have more or less unlimited discretion as to how they do that.

This gives us the way Hobbes solves the local problem. Antebellum England was a 'kingdom divided in itself'. The sovereign power was, or was thought to be, split between the king and parliament.[157] Convention, precedent, and, from 1628, the Petition of Right required that no

---

[156] The phrase 'a kingdom divided in itself cannot stand' is Biblical; Mark 3:24 [KJV] is 'And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand'. It is an interesting coincidence that Abraham Lincoln employed the phrase in 1858, when accepting his nomination as Senator for Illinois.

[157] Perhaps most obviously on display in the struggle over the militia in 1641-42.

taxation could be imposed without parliamentary consent. This is one of the most important divisions of power. Further straining the relationship between Charles and parliament was the king's attitude that funds were to be granted before grievances were addressed, the opposite of parliament's preference for grievances before funds. These attitudes were well-illustrated in the Short Parliament. Religion was another area in which the kingdom was divided in itself. As we saw, one of Pym's major grievances was 'innovations in matters of religion'. Pym objected to the king and Archbishop Laud's innovations in Church matters, denying that the king was in sole charge of religious affairs. Similarly, the imposition of the Book of Common Prayer in Scotland sparked the Covenanter uprising, a rejection of the king's religious authority. Finally came the division in control of the armed forces: neither the king nor parliament felt the other could be trusted with control of the militia—hence parliament's introduction of, and Charles's rejection of, the Militia Ordinance. It is interesting that Hobbes specifically mentions the three indivisible powers of sovereignty he cites in the passage quoted above: the power of the militia; the power of raising money; and the government of doctrines. These three powers were prominent in the struggles between King Charles I and his parliaments.

Hobbes takes issue with this idea that sovereignty was divided or shared between the king and parliament.[158] Indeed, as we have seen, he insists that had this erroneous opinion not been commonly held, the Civil War would never have occurred (xviii, 16). In Chapter XXIX of *Leviathan*, Hobbes describes eleven features of a commonwealth which weaken it or make it prone to dissolution; three of them are of particular interest to us. These are: the assumption that the sovereign power is divisible (xxix, 12); the notion of mixed government (xxix, 16); and the desire to imitate the Greeks and Romans (xxix, 14). Dividing the sovereign power fatally weakens the commonwealth, 'for what is it to divide the power of a commonwealth, but to dissolve it; for powers divided mutually destroy each other' (xxix, 12). Hobbes compares the notion of mixed government to having more than one soul in the body of civil government, 'as when the power of levying money . . . has depended on a general assembly, the power of conduct and command . . . on one man, and the power of making laws . . . on the accidental consent, not only of those two, but also of a third; this endangereth the commonwealth' (xxix, 16).[159] This is an illustration of the local problem, an example of how

[158] Brandon, *Coherence*, 34.
[159] This analogy with souls is well-developed in *Leviathan*. Hobbes notes that 'as there have been doctors that hold there be three souls in a man, so there be also that think there may be more souls (that is, more sovereigns)

the sovereign power was divided. Indeed, Hobbes thinks that such a mixed government is not one government at all: it splits the commonwealth into three independent factions rather than one representative. Hobbes concludes that 'if the king bear the person of the people, and the general assembly bear also the person of the people, and another assembly bear the person of a part of the people, they are not one person, nor one sovereign, but three persons, and three sovereigns' (xxix, 16). This is clearly problematic for Hobbes. Hobbes warns against seeking to imitate the ancient Greeks and Romans, as this leads to rebellion against monarchy. Works about these classical civilisations, Hobbes claims, make it 'lawful and laudable' for someone to rebel against and indeed kill the king, 'provided, before he do it, he call him tyrant' (xxix, 14). This weakness of a commonwealth is interesting to us because in *Behemoth*, Hobbes's own history of the period, Hobbes blamed the corruption of the people, which led to the Civil War, on—among other things—those who admired the Greeks and Romans, out of whom 'were chosen the greatest part of the House of Commons, or if they were not the greatest part, yet by advantage of their eloquence, were always able to sway the rest'.[160] Hobbes might be conflating correlation and causation, here.

Hobbes solves the problem of a kingdom divided in itself by granting the Sovereign near-absolute power, and by making explicit that the essential powers of sovereignty *cannot* be divided, and if the sovereign power *is* divided, there are serious consequences. Recall Brandon's argument that either the Sovereign possesses the entire sovereign power, or they are not really the Sovereign, and the dichotomy between civil society and the state of nature. James J. Hamilton argues that, for Hobbes, rebellion and civil war are examples of the return to anarchy caused by dividing the sovereign power, and the Civil Wars in particular are an important example.[161] The constitutional or political aspect of this problem we can deal with briefly; I have indicated Hobbes's insistence that the sovereign power is necessarily indivisible. The religious aspects of the problem deserve more attention, so it is to them we now turn. Though, as noted earlier, it is unwise to separate the temporal and spiritual in early modern England, this is a division Hobbes himself makes: Part II of *Leviathan* is 'Of Commonwealth'; Part III is 'Of a Christian Commonwealth'.

---

than one in a commonwealth' (xxix, 15). Hobbes says the power of levying money is the 'nutritive faculty', the power of conduct and command (military command) is the 'motive faculty', and the power of making laws is the 'rational faculty'. These three kinds of soul, nutritive, locomotive, and rational, are Aristotelian. Aristotle, "On the Soul," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 413a23.

[160] Hobbes, "Behemoth," 168.

[161] Hamilton, "Origins," 159.

The religious problem is essentially the same as the constitutional one: that England was a kingdom divided. This was not uncommon in Europe at the time. The problem was not that there was *no* Sovereign, but that there appeared to be *too many* Sovereigns.[162] We saw that a feature of Presbyterianism is that the ecclesiastical power can give the civil sovereign—in this case, the king—binding commands. This religious issue is important because it blurred the boundaries of civil and religious authority. On some views religious authority was intrinsic to political authority, but on other views religious authority can be a direct threat to civil society.[163] Indeed, control of the established church was effectively one of the powers of sovereignty and formed the main part of opposition to royal policy in the early 1640s, much more than purely political matters.[164] As we have seen, disputes between Anglicans and Puritans had profound political consequences. Though the religious problem is more or less the same as the political one, and Hobbes's solution to it more or less the same, it is worth taking the time to explore his justification for unifying the civil and religious power under the same Sovereign, and how the Church functions as part of the ideal state. In part this is necessary because, though we are accustomed to the separation of Church and State in our own day, such separation was unknown to Hobbes.

Hobbes's ideal state holds that religious authority is part of the sovereign power and so there cannot be any ecclesiastical authority independent of the Sovereign. This is a radical position, with no parallel in Europe outside the theocracy of the Papal States.[165] Hobbes argues that 'Christ hath not left to his ministers in this world, unless they be also endued with civil authority, any authority to command other men' (xlii, 10). But the Sovereign's religious authority comes directly from God: 'all pastors, except the supreme, execute their charges in the right (that is, by the authority) of the civil sovereign, that is, *jure civili*. But the king as every other sovereign executeth his office of supreme pastor by immediate authority from God (that is to say, in God's right, or *jure divino*)' (xlii, 71).[166] Hobbes departs here from Anglicanism, which holds that bishops receive their spiritual powers (such as the power to

---

[162] Brandon, *Coherence*, 3.
[163] Prior, "Religion," 25.
[164] Orr, "Sovereignty," 490.
[165] James J. Hamilton, "Hobbes the Royalist, Hobbes the Republican," *History of Political Thought* 30, no. 3 (2009): 448.
[166] Hobbes makes no attempt to demonstrate this; he seems to treat it as an axiom. It has been suggested that he leaves it undemonstrated because the arguments in Part III of *Leviathan* rely on faith more than reason or nature. Patterson-Tutschka, "Cromwell and the Rump," 646.

administer the sacrament), as well as their authority to govern the Church, directly from God, though they are appointed by the civil sovereign.[167] To bolster the case that religious authority is synonymous with civil authority, Hobbes points out that Christ, 'who for calling for, might have had twelve legions of immortal, unvulnerable angels to assist him', nevertheless submitted to Pilate who 'unjustly, without finding fault in him [Christ], delivered him to the Jews to be crucified' (xlii, 131). It is perhaps noteworthy that Hobbes does not commit the Sovereign to an Anglican Church. The Sovereign may, if they please, commit the control of the Church to the Pope—though Hobbes points out that the Pope would be *subordinate* to the Sovereign—or to one supreme pastor (or an assembly of pastors), or whatever structure they please. But, any such appointment grants authority *jure civili*, by right of the civil Sovereign, and not *jure divino*, by direct authority from God (xlii, 80). All this is to reinforce the case that the civil Sovereign and the spiritual Sovereign are one and the same in Hobbes's ideal state. By creating a Sovereign who is imbued with all the legal powers of sovereignty as well as supreme religious authority, Hobbes solves the problem of a divided kingdom. We should note that this takes the wind out of the Scottish Covenanters' sails. Recall that one of the key principles of Presbyterianism is that the religious authority can give the civil authority binding commands. On Hobbes's account, this is no longer possible, as the religious authority derives its status from the civil authority, and is necessarily subordinate to it.[168] The religious arguments in *Leviathan* serve to solve the problem of too many Sovereigns, where religious authority could dictate to the civil authority.

The second problem Hobbes uses his ideal state to solve is whether the king or parliament ought to be considered the true representative of the people. To understand how Hobbes solves this problem, we will first explore how Hobbes's theory of representation works, then apply it to the English context. We begin by defining several terms. Hobbes makes a distinction between *natural* and *artificial* persons: a natural person is one whose words or actions are their own; an artificial person's words and actions represent those of someone else (xvi, 2). The terms *actor* and *personate* are introduced; the latter means to act as another, or to act in their name. Artificial persons can have their words and actions 'owned' by whoever

---

[167] Sommerville, "Anglican Context," 366.
[168] Hobbes's ideal state probably, therefore, abolishes the distinction between civil and canon law. He does not say so specifically, but he says that the distinction between civil and canon law arises from the mistaken conception that the present Church is the kingdom of God (xliv, 8).

they personate, or represent. In such a case, the artificial person is the actor, and whoever owns the words or actions is the *author*, 'in which case the actor acteth by authority' (xvi, 4). The 1668 Latin edition of *Leviathan* explains this point somewhat more clearly: 'the words and deeds of those who represent are sometimes acknowledged as their own by whom they represent; and then the one who represents is called the actor, and the one who is represented is called the author, as the one by whose authority the actor acts'.[169] From this, Hobbes argues, it follows that a covenant made by authority is just as binding on the author as one made by the author directly (xvi, 5). When a group—"multitude" in Hobbes's terms—is represented by a single person, as in the case where the Sovereign is a monarch, for example, each member of the group authorises the representative individually: 'each man giving their common representer authority from himself in particular' (xvi, 14). The representative does not represent the group *qua* group, but represents each member of that group individually. If the representative is itself a group, Hobbes just assumes majoritarianism, as we saw earlier: 'the voice of the greatest number must be considered as the voice of them all' (xvi, 15). This avoids an infinite regress of a group requiring a representative and the representative (if it is itself a group) requiring a representative, and so on *ad infinitum*.

The individuals who are represented authorise the actions of their representative; in the case where the authority is unlimited, as in the covenant authorising the Sovereign, each member of the group authorises 'all the actions the representer doth' (xvi, 14). What Hobbes seems to mean here is that if I authorise someone to represent me in a particular sphere, then I am the author of the representative's actions in that sphere; the representative's actions may be attributed to me. It follows that if I authorise a representative to act on behalf in a broader sphere, I will be the author of more of the representative's actions. If I then authorise a representative to act on my behalf completely, according to their own discretion, Hobbes thinks it follows that I will be the author of *all* the representative's actions (*qua* representative—we should remember that a representative is still a natural person or group of natural persons). This does not seem to reflect how we think about authorisation now. David Copp makes a distinction between "warrant authority" and "commission authority".[170] Warrant authority gives a representative a legal, moral, or some other warrant to act. For instance, Parliament has a legal warrant to pass legislation; they have a legal right to do so.

---

[169] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 101, n. 2.
[170] David Copp, "Hobbes on Artificial Persons and Collective Actions," *The Philosophical Review* 89, no. 4 (1980): 589-90.

142

But this does not involve any authorship on our part. Similarly, if I lend you a book, and permit you to take it from my home to read and enjoy it, I have given you a warrant to act, but I am in no way the *author* of your actions. Authorship seems to involve commissioning an action,[171] and this can be distinct from warrant authority. Copp's example is building a house. The action of building a house may be attributed to me on the basis of work done by people whom I have hired. It is still attributed to me if, by mistake, the house is built on land I do not own and on which I have no right to be building anything. The workers are acting "by commission", but have not been given any legal warrant to act.[172] Indeed, we often attribute commission actions to their author. A.J.P. Taylor notes that, in pinning all the responsibility for the Second World War on Adolf Hitler, 'it seems to be believed nowadays that Hitler did everything himself, even driving the trains and filling the gas chambers unaided'.[173] Warrant actions seem to involve some transfer of right, but commission actions do not. Thus, Hobbes's theory of representation seems to have some serious difficulties but it is not our task here to explore or attempt to fix those difficulties; we are seeking to understand how Hobbes is using his theories.

The theory of representation is used for at least two purposes: to demonstrate that the Sovereign cannot injure their subjects and therefore cannot be punished by them, and to counter the claim that parliament is the true representative of the people.[174] We start with the latter claim. Hobbes describes sovereignty as 'an artificial soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body [of the commonwealth]' (Intro., 1). Interestingly, John Pym described parliament as 'that to the Commonwealth which the soul is to the body, which is only able to apprehend and understand the symptoms of all such diseases which threaten the body politic'.[175]

In order to show how the Sovereign is the only proper representative of the people, we need to go back to the original covenant which creates the ideal state in the first place. Hobbes describes that covenant made between all the people

---

[171] Ibid., 591.
[172] Ibid.
[173] A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1969), 26-27.
[174] Malcolm, *Introduction*, 20.
[175] Kenyon, *Stuart Constitution*, 184. This connects nicely with a comment Hobbes makes about mixed monarchy as being more than one sovereign: 'to what disease in the natural body of man I may exactly compare this irregularity of a commonwealth, I know not. But I have seen a man that had another man growing out of his side, with an head, arms, breast, and stomach of his own; if he had had another man growing out of his other side, the comparison might then have been exact' (xxix, 17).

to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will, which is as much to say, to appoint one man or assembly of men to bear their person, and every one to own and acknowledge himself to be author of whatsoever he that so beareth their person shall act, or cause to be acted, in those things which concern the common peace and safety (xvii, 13).[176]

That is, the people covenant with each other to appoint a common representative, who is the Sovereign. There can only be one representative of the people, except where the Sovereign directs to certain particular ends (xix, 3). There cannot be more than one representative for, if there were, the sovereign power would be divided and 'thereby reduce the multitude into the condition of war, contrary to the end for which all sovereignty is instituted' (xix, 3). Hobbes argues that it is absurd to think that a sovereign assembly, 'inviting the people of their dominion to send up their deputies with power to make known their advice or desires, should therefore hold such deputies (rather than themselves) for the absolute representative of the people' (xix, 3). If this situation is absurd, then it is also absurd to think the same should be true in a monarchy—in that, we replace "sovereign assembly" with "sovereign monarch". It is important to remember that a representative, in Hobbes's system, is someone empowered to act on our behalf, and that the subjects are the original author of everything the Sovereign representative does. In the terms Copp uses, all the Sovereign's actions are commissioned by each subject.

The Sovereign, properly understood as representative of the people, cannot, on Hobbes's account, do injury or injustice to any of their subjects, because we cannot injure ourselves (xviii, 6). Additionally, the subjects cannot punish the Sovereign in any way. Indeed, once the form of government—monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy—has been established, the subjects cannot then change it (xviii, 3). Further, Hobbes declares that 'because every subject is by this institution [the original covenant] author of all the actions and judgments of the sovereign instituted, it follows that, whatsoever he doth, it can be no injury to any of his subjects, nor ought he to be by any of them accused of injustice' (xviii, 6). Hobbes does concede that the Sovereign can commit *iniquity*, but not injustice (xviii, 6). Here again the Latin edition of *Leviathan* clarifies, saying that 'what is done contrary to the law of nature is

---

[176] There is a unanimous aspect and a majoritarian aspect to this covenant. While we unanimously agree to give up our rights to a sovereign, the *particular* sovereign is chosen by majority. Hobbes says that 'A *commonwealth* is said to be *instituted*, when a *multitude* of men do agree and *covenant*, *every one with every one*, that to whatsoever *man* or *assembly of men* shall be given by the major part the *right* to *present* the person of them all (that is to say, to be their *representative*) every one, as well he that *voted for it* as he that *voted against it*, shall *authorize* all the actions and judgements of that man or assembly of men' (xviii, 1).

144

called inequitable; what is done contrary to the civil law, unjust'.[177] The Sovereign can act contrary to the law of nature, but cannot act contrary to the civil law. Glenn Burgess argues that Hobbes's argument about representation only really works in the particular circumstances of the seventeenth century. According to Burgess, the argument only works in a context where Hobbes's opponents are committed to two claims: that England is a mixed monarchy and that the House of Commons and the House of Lords can represent the people in the absence of the king.[178] Hobbes's method shows that a mixed monarchy is impossible, and that only the Sovereign can be the representative of the people. By working through the original covenant and the theory of representation he resolves the disagreement. We might be sceptical, given that the state of nature and the original covenant as Hobbes describes them are both probably impossible. However, Hobbes notes that a state may be established either through institution—the covenant—or by acquisition; that is, by force. Such a state is one where 'when men singly (or many together by plurality of voices) for fear of death or bonds do authorize all the actions of that man or assembly that hath their lives and liberty in his power' (xx, 1). The rights and consequences of sovereignty are the same in a commonwealth acquired by force as one established by institution (xx, 3). In the English context, we could point to the Norman Conquest in 1066 as a point where the commonwealth was acquired by force, or closer to Hobbes's time, the Wars of the Roses, which ended in 1485 with Henry VII taking the throne. Thus, by Hobbes's account, it is clear that Charles is the Sovereign and, accordingly, the true representative of the English people.

These two points, an indivisible sovereign power and Hobbes's theory of representation, solve the problem of England's divisions before the civil war. England, in the period leading up to the civil war, was a kingdom divided in itself. As such, it cannot stand. In Hobbes's mind, England was fatally flawed by allowing the sovereign power to be divided. Hobbes solves this problem in the ideal state by clarifying that the Sovereign's powers are indivisible, and that the Sovereign is the true representative of the people. For Hobbes, the near-absolute Sovereign is the best possible solution, though it has been suggested that he perceived some problems with it: subjectivism of decisions, an inadequate care for the people's good, and weak control over officials are the most pressing. But these issues are minor compared with the benefits of Hobbesian absolutism.[179]

---

[177] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 113, n. 4.
[178] Burgess, "Contexts," 687-88.
[179] Charchuła, "Hobbes' Theory of State," 197-98.

4.4 Conclusion

There is evidence that *Leviathan* did not sell well when it was first published, partly due to its price and the relative glut of Hobbes's works already on the market.[180] The way Hobbes presents his arguments in *Leviathan* is politically ambivalent; it can be read as a defence of Royalism or as a defence of republicanism, depending on the reader. In this way it escapes easy categorisation. Hobbes's readers therefore had a range of responses, variously attacking *Leviathan* as atheistic, politically subversive, and—rather bizarrely—in one case using it to support an argument for Catholic toleration.[181] Readers tended to take a philosophical view of the text, treating it as applicable everywhere. For example, Sir Robert Filmer—probably most memorable now for being the target of Locke's *First Treatise of Government*—attacked Hobbes's argument that we cannot give up the right to self-preservation. Filmer argued that 'these last doctrines are destructive of all governments whatsoever, and even to the *Leviathan* itself. Hereby any rogue or villain may murder his sovereign, if the sovereign but offer by force to whip or lay him in the stocks, since whipping may be said to be a wounding and putting him in the stocks an imprisonment'.[182] The way England's local problems had shaped Hobbes's ideal state were not recognised.

Hobbes's ideal state is unquestionably authoritarian, his Sovereign imbued with significant power. Like Plato, Hobbes does not show the respect for human rights which underpin many of our actual states and which many of us would assume needs to be at the heart of an ideal state—though this is perhaps unsurprising; parliament did not pass a Bill of Rights until 1688, nearly forty years after *Leviathan* was published. Hobbes justifies his programme by comparing it to the state of nature and arguing that there is no alternative: his ideal state is the only effective bulwark against returning to the war of every man against every man. It is fear of the state of nature that motivates us to covenant with each other to establish the Sovereign. The ideal state is formed with the key purpose of protecting its subjects from the state of nature. Indeed, the ideal state is a way of protecting its people from the worst aspects of human nature. Accordingly, the near-absolute nature of sovereign power, especially its

---

[180] Jon Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan: The Reception of the Political and Religious Ideas of Thomas Hobbes in England, 1640-1700*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 96.

[181] Parkin, ibid, explores many of the reactions and responses to Hobbes, noting that it is a tricky work to apply to contemporary discussions.

[182] Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan*, 111.

indivisibility, and the theory of representation are intended to foster that goal of protection. The actual government of Charles I and his parliaments failed in spectacular fashion to meet that goal, leading to a long and bloody war.

Hobbes, though writing *Leviathan* at the end of the Civil Wars, after the execution of Charles in January 1649, is dealing with a fundamentally pre-war problem. The war itself is the ultimate consequence of the problem, but it is not the problem itself. Hobbes identifies the core of the problem as a fatal division in the sovereign power, and a mistaken belief of who represents the people. Hobbes aims to correct this; in his ideal state the civil war would have been impossible. Disputes over crown revenue would never have occurred, because the Sovereign—the king—would have maintained the right to raise funds; the Scots would not have revolted against the imposition of the Book of Common Prayer because the king has the acknowledged power of determining doctrine and is head of the Church, a right granted *jure divino*. Parliament would not have attempted to take the power of the militia away from the king, for parliament is, on Hobbes's account, a body to act as an intermediary between the monarch and his subjects, a relay for grievances and advice. It can make no claim to any substantial powers except those explicitly delegated to it by the Sovereign.

In this chapter, I have avoided trying to discuss Hobbes's own allegiances; whether he was a Royalist, or some kind of parliamentarian. Jeffrey Collins, for instance, argues that if the English Revolution is understood as a war to protect the Anglican nature of the church, and to consolidate the state's coercive power, Thomas Hobbes 'emerges from the shadow of his royalist reputation and appears as a defender of core elements of the revolutionary cause'.[183] Malcolm, on the other hand, holds that when Hobbes wrote *Leviathan*, he did so as a committed royalist, deeply hostile to the actions of the rebels, and aiming to show exactly why the rebellion, both in its actions and its intellectual defence, were wrong.[184] Hobbes himself later wrote that 'as it is, I believe it [*Leviathan*] hath framed the minds of a thousand gentlemen to a conscientious obedience to present government, which otherwise would have wavered on that point'.[185] The dedicatory letter of this work, the *Six Lessons*, is dated 10 June 1656, two years before the death of Oliver Cromwell and four years before the restoration of

---

[183] Collins, *Allegiance*, 58.
[184] Malcolm, *Introduction*, 24-25.
[185] Hobbes, "Six Lessons," 336.

the monarchy. Much of this conversation depends on events after 1642, which is why we have not touched on it.

5. Marx and Engels, the *Communist Manifesto,* and the Hungry Forties

Our final ideal state, as expressed in scattered and sometimes contradictory fragments throughout the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels,[1] is the one which many of us would agree has had the greatest effect on the modern world. The USSR, a Marxist-Leninist state, dominated world events for much of the twentieth century. In the twenty-first century, China and Cuba are still at least nominally communist. Throughout their writings, Marx and Engels take themselves to be engaged in what we would call social science. They think of themselves as observing an ongoing process, and making predictions about how it will develop. The predictions they make are supposedly scientific, based on empirical evidence and grounded in a historical account of earlier developments. The ideal state they propose is a remedy for present ills, a general solution to the problems they identify. However, as we have seen several times by now, this does not tell the whole story. Rather than as the result of a scientific analysis, the Marxian ideal state is better read as a particular solution to the problem of social conditions in the mid-nineteenth century that might also apply outside that narrow context.[2] In the other chapters, we have seen how a model of the ideal state proposes a solution to some problem in the author's historical context; in this chapter we might usefully frame the process in terms of diagnosis and prognosis. Rather than identify a problem which the ideal state fixes, Marx and Engels identify a problem which they argue will be resolved through a revolutionary metamorphosis, and by the end of this process the ideal state will have been realised. This is one of a number of interesting contrasts between the Marxian ideal state and the others we have investigated; we will mention other contrasts as they arise.

To fully explore the relationship between the ideal communist state and the historical context in which Marx and Engels lived and worked would require more space than we have

---

[1] Kumar, *Utopia & Anti-Utopia*, 57. There is an interesting question of how closely Marx and Engels should be taken to agree with one another; whether a work by the two of them together should be thought to espouse the same views as a work written by one of them alone. Indeed, Gareth Stedman Jones argues that the differences between Marx and Engels largely arise in the way they each conceive of communism, in part because of the socialist traditions they had encountered before they began to collaborate. He suggests that the fact that these differences were not explored directly and left unresolved may help to account for the obscurity which surrounds the description of communism at the heart of their work. Gareth Stedman Jones, Introduction to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones (London: Penguin, 2002), 66.

[2] By "Marxian" I mean the work of Marx and Engels themselves, both to distinguish from the later Marxist tradition and to avoid having to constantly refer to "Marx and Engels", which is somewhat cumbersome. I borrow this usage from Terrell Carver, "The Marxian Tradition," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. George Klosko (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

available, so our focus here is mainly on the *Communist Manifesto*, and we will refer to other works as needed. We should start with the terms "socialism" and "communism", which are without doubt loaded words in our own day. For example, in 1952 US President Harry Truman attacked his Republican opponents by claiming that 'Socialism is a scare word they have hurled at every advance the people have made in the last 20 years. . . . Socialism is their name for almost anything that helps all the people'.[3] Thirty years after the collapse of the USSR, the term "socialism" is for many still inextricably associated with the Soviet Union: for example, recently several New Zealand MPs declared themselves to be "socialists" in the House of Representatives, with responses from right-wing parties and lobby groups explicitly equating "socialist" with the USSR.[4] It is important to understand how "socialism" and "communism" were understood in the first half of the nineteenth century. We want to try and recapture the way these terms were understood by Marx and Engels and other contemporaries, to discard as much as we can our associations with the USSR or people like US Senator Joseph McCarthy. The association between "socialism" and totalitarianism is a strong one, but obviously for Marx and Engels and their contemporaries, that association did not exist. We will briefly explore the way the terms socialism and communism were understood, and give a brief history of the *Manifesto* itself.

The term "socialism" was first used in 1832; its adherents give priority to the "social question" above merely political reform.[5] On one account, the terms "socialism" and "communism" were used interchangeably in the early 1840s.[6] On another account, there was a difference of degree between socialism and communism. In mid-1844, one contemporary of Marx and Engels wrote to Marx that 'soon, all of educated Germany will be socialist—

---

[3] Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum. "Rear Platform and Other Informal Remarks in New York (October 10, 1952)," accessed November 2020, https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/289/rear-platform-and-other-informal-remarks-new-york.

[4] Labour MP Kieran McAnulty was the first to self-identify as a socialist during the 2021 Budget debate, followed by several other MPs, mostly from the Labour party. The lobby group Taxpayers' Union produced images which quoted these MPs, citing the Budget debate in a faux-Cyrillic font and featuring a large hammer and sickle. ACT MP and leader David Seymour tweeted a video of McAnulty's declaration of socialist principles with the flag of the USSR imposed over the video. New Zealand House of Representatives. "Taxation (Budget 2021 and Remedial Measures) Bill—First Reading," 22 May 2021, accessed June 2021, https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/rhr/combined/HansDeb_20210520_20210520_40; "Taxation (Budget 2021 and Remedial Measures) Bill—Second Reading," 22 May 2021, accessed June 2021, https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/rhr/combined/HansDeb_20210520_20210520_44; Taxpayers' Union. "Twitter / @Taxpayersunion "Reminder . . .","" 22 May 2021, accessed June 2021, https://twitter.com/TaxpayersUnion/status/1395910028570382338; David Seymour. "Twitter / @Dbseymour "Labour MP and Socialist . . .","" 20 May 2021, June 2021, https://twitter.com/dbseymour/status/1395296519402651649.

[5] Mike Rapport, *1848: Year of Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 36.

[6] Carver, "Marxian Tradition," 396.

radically socialist, in fact; I mean communist'.[7] There is also a possible distinction in that "socialism" was associated with an intellectual movement, while "communism" was associated with the secret societies of the time.[8] Tristram Hunt traces the change in how Marx and Engels referred to themselves; they began to call themselves communists, in part to differentiate themselves from the so-called "utopian socialists", when they began to associate with the League of the Just, which later became the Communist League. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the term "communism" became associated with insurrection, especially in the aftermath of the Paris Commune of 1871. From that point Marx and Engels tended to describe themselves as "socialists", or "scientific socialists". It was not until the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party was renamed the All-Russian Communist Party in 1918 that the term communist re-emerged.[9] The key point for us to remember is that "socialism" in the early nineteenth century meant a focus on social change; "communism" meant a radical kind of socialism.

Part of capturing what socialism means in the context we are interested in means recognising its scope. Socialism in the early nineteenth century was a much broader category than it is today. The range of contemporaneous socialist theories is illustrated by Part III of the *Communist Manifesto*—its 'most neglected part'[10]—which offers a critique of a number of different kinds of socialism. Marx and Engels group these under three general headings: Reactionary Socialism; Conservative, or Bourgeois, Socialism; and Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism (*MECW* 6: 507-517). David Leopold usefully categorises these as 'backward-looking' socialism, which identifies the good society with some aspect of the past, 'sideways-looking' socialism, which identifies the good society with some reformed aspect of the present, and 'forward-looking' socialism, which identifies the good society with future developments.[11] To indicate how broad "socialism" was, Marx and Engels include among the Reactionary Socialists some of the French Legitimists (*MECW* 6: 508), who sought to restore the Bourbon monarchy, which had been overthrown in the revolution of 1830. Presumably these Legitimists believed that restoring the Bourbon monarchy would bring about positive social change.

---

[7] Quoted in Liedman, *A World to Win*, 118.
[8] Tristram Hunt, *The Frock-Coated Communist: The Revolutionary Life of Friedrich Engels* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 67, f/n.
[9] Ibid.
[10] David Leopold, "Marx, Engels and Other Socialisms," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Communist Manifesto*, ed. Terrell Carver and James Farr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 32.
[11] Ibid., 36.

The last element of our preliminary contextual discussion is the *Manifesto* itself. In November 1847, the Communist League, a group of mostly German emigrés living in London,[12] commissioned Marx and Engels to produce a manifesto of their aims.[13] It was Marx in particular who was vital to the project; he was the leading theorist, and was thought to have a greater ability to rally an audience than Engels.[14] The *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (in German *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*) was published in London in February 1848,[15] not long before the February Revolution in Paris toppled the French monarchy and set Europe alight with the fires of liberal revolution. Following the defeat of the revolutions, Marx emigrated to Britain in mid-1849, where he remained for the rest of his life.[16] That the *Manifesto* and the revolutions appeared at the same time is not surprising, for they are both, at least in part, reactions and responses to the same thing: the "social question".

5.1 The Ideal State of Marx and Engels

Before we can explore the social question, which forms an important part of the Marxian diagnosis of the troubles plaguing Europe, we first need to examine Marx and Engels's status as ideal state theorists. In Chapter 2, we saw that it is possible to deny that Marx and Engels offer a model of the ideal state at all. We can identify three claims in support of that view. First, a model of the ideal state, remember, is a description of the best possible political organisation, based on assumptions about the way people actually are—commonly a theory of human nature. However, it has been claimed that Marx and Engels reject the idea of a fixed human nature.[17] Second, those who deny Marx and Engels are ideal state theorists claim that there is no trace of utopianism to be found in their work: rather, it is "scientific". Finally, it is claimed that Marx and Engels are engaged in predicting the future development of the state; they are not prescribing an ideal. However, we concluded in Chapter 2 that there is something which looks very *like* an ideal state in Marx and Engels's work, and that a closer examination would be helpful. The following sections investigate each of these three claims above and refute them, thereby demonstrating that Marx and Engels do in fact offer a model

---

[12] Mark Cowling, ed., *The Communist Manifesto: New Interpretations* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 2.

[13] George R. Boyer, "The Historical Background of the Communist Manifesto," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 12, no. 4 (1998): 152.

[14] Liedman, *A World to Win*, 224.

[15] Claeys, *Marx and Marxism*, 118.

[16] Jonathan Sperber, *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life* (New York and London: Liverlight, 2013), 243.

[17] Norman Geras, *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend* (London: NLB, 1983), 13-14. Geras, incidentally, describes this view as 'a rather obstinate old legend', ibid., 11.

of the ideal state. This will help us to understand the philosophical foundation of the Marxian ideal state, after which we can explore its historical foundations. These philosophical and historical foundations are important because many of Marx's works were written in a political context which is difficult to recover.[18] In addition, Marx derives much of his thought from the philosophical tradition of German idealism, which is 'alien to most English readers and arguably to the English language itself'.[19] In this case, the intellectual and philosophical context and the historical context are both important to understanding the local problems that the Marxian ideal state solves.

5.1.1 Human Nature and Species-Being

The first claim to examine is that Marx and Engels reject the idea of a fixed human nature. Strictly speaking, we are talking about *Marx's* theory of human nature here, for he developed it before he began to collaborate with Engels. Norman Geras shows that the case for Marx rejecting human nature is thin.[20] Many of those who defend this claim that Marx has no theory of human nature point to his sixth thesis on Feuerbach for support, where Marx says that 'the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations' (*MECW* 5: 4).[21] This thesis leads us to think that, for Marx, human nature depends on historical circumstances and changes over time. However, this thesis does not necessarily constitute a rejection of the idea that there is something distinctive about humans which distinguishes them from other animals.[22] There is good evidence that Marx *does* have a theory of human nature, and that our human nature does not, in fact, change over time.

---

[18] There are two major obstacles to reconstructing the political context of mid-nineteenth century Europe. Most obviously is scale: we would need to understand events and institutions in (at a minimum) Britain, France, pre-unification Germany and Italy, and the Habsburg Empire. The second, and larger, obstacle is that politics in this period was dominated by the heritage of the French Revolution. Unfortunately, we do not have space to explore in depth how the French Revolution influenced events in 1848. To put its importance in a nutshell, though Marx claims that the spectre of communism was haunting Europe, if there was a spectre of anything haunting Europe in 1848, it was the spectre of the French Revolution.

[19] Terrell Carver, "Reading Marx: Life and Works," in *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, ed. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 14.

[20] Geras, *Human Nature*, 12.

[21] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 5, Marx and Engels: 1845-47* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976).

[22] Allen W. Wood, *Karl Marx*, 2nd ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 17.

To lay out the case for Marx having a theory of human nature, let us begin by stipulating just what we want such a theory to do. As with so much else, we can turn to Aristotle, who gives the paradigmatic example of the role a theory of human nature plays in traditional philosophy.[23] On this account, a theory of human nature does two things. It posits a characteristic which distinguishes humans from other animals,[24] and the development of the distinctively human life is taken to consist in developing that specific characteristic.[25] Chris Byron undertakes a careful analysis both of Marx's writings and later scholarly discussion in order to show that he does in fact have a theory of human nature. Byron's starting point is to define "human nature" as 'an attribute of the human species that is uniquely/distinctly human'.[26] Strictly speaking, when we are talking about Marx's theory of human nature, we are talking about his theory of *species-being* (*Gattungswesen* in German).[27] There is an interesting ambiguity in this term. We can interpret it to mean that something is a "species-creature", taking "being" as "type of thing"; understood this way, a species-being can only exist in some kind of social relationship with others of the same species.[28] It can also mean "species-essence", taking "being" as talking about a type of character. That is, humans possess species-being, the type of character which is distinctively human. Both of these senses are present in Marx, but it is the latter sense which is important for understanding Marx's ideas about alienation, which we will get to later in this chapter.[29] Marx's theory of species-being is not explored in the *Manifesto*, so we must look to the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (*MECW 3*, otherwise known as the *Paris Manuscripts*, and referred to hereafter as simply the *Manuscripts*) for most of our information about Marx's ideas about human nature.[30]

---

[23] Thomas E. Wartenberg, ""Species-Being" and "Human Nature" in Marx," *Human Studies* 5, no. 2 (1982): 78.

[24] It is important to remember that we are interested in the qualities which separate or distinguish humans from other animals. Any traits which we share with other animals—hunger and thirst, for instance—are merely aspects of our animal nature, they are not part of our *human* nature. Chris Byron, "Essence and Alienation: Marx's Theory of Human Nature," *Science and Society* 80, no. 3 (2016): 378.

[25] Wartenberg, ""Species-Being" and "Human Nature" in Marx," 78. Aristotle's approach follows the function argument, the idea that the good follows from a thing fulfilling its particular role or function. For humans, the good life is 'activity of soul in conformity with excellence'. Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," 1097b26-27, 98a15.

[26] Byron, "Essence and Alienation," 377.

[27] Marx gets this term from Ludwig Feuerbach, who applies it both to humans and humanity as a whole. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 3, Marx and Engels: 1843-44* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 601, n. 73.

[28] This sense of species-being connects with Aristotle's definition of humans as political animals (*zoon politikon*).

[29] Wartenberg, ""Species-Being" and "Human Nature" in Marx," 79.

[30] It is worth noting that Byron and Sean Sayers both argue that Marx's views about human nature are consistent from the early writings in the 1840s through to *Capital* in 1867. Byron, "Essence and Alienation," 378; Sean Sayers, *Marx & Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 67.

In the *Manuscripts*, Marx writes that 'the productive life is the life of the species. It is life-engendering life. The whole character of a species—its species-character—is contained in the character of its life activity; and free conscious activity is man's species character' (*MECW* 3: 276). The key point is that through productive activity we are able to be distinctively human.[31] Marx acknowledges that some animals produce, but what is unique about human production, or human labour, is that it is free activity. Animals produce to satisfy immediate needs; humans can produce beyond immediate needs.[32] Marx phrases this as an animal 'produces one-sidedly, whilst man produces universally. It produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom' (*MECW* 3: 276).[33] A further aspect of species-being is self-consciousness: we have some conception of the human species, and a conception of ourselves as members of this species.[34] Marx's theory of human nature, then, describes humans as self-conscious beings, who are characterised by free, conscious, productive labour. This is the distinctive feature of the human species, which distinguishes us from other animals, and the distinctively human life is taken as the development of this characteristic. To put it another way, what is distinctive about humans is that we are essentially creative, and we are conscious of ourselves as part of a species; as Marx puts it man 'adopts the species . . . as his object' (*MECW* 3: 275).[35]

As we saw earlier, the Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach does not necessarily deny that there is something distinctive about humans. It asserts only that this distinctive feature is bound up with the social relationships in which individuals stand, and that it must be understood in light of those social relationships.[36] Labour, the distinctively human activity, is historical: as the tools and methods of production change over time, human beings alter the way their humanity is expressed.[37] Social relations are just as much the creation of human labour as material products are; when we create a material product, we create social relationships at the

---

[31] Wartenberg, ""Species-Being" and "Human Nature" in Marx," 79.

[32] Byron, "Essence and Alienation," 381. Struhl makes the point that animals produce in response to instinct; humans are able to produce more flexibly. Struhl, "Marx and Human Nature," 84.

[33] What Marx might have in mind here is the contrast between the productive capacities of a person who is not well-fed, or without good housing, and so on, compared with someone who is well-fed and housed, and so on.

[34] Wood, *Karl Marx*, 19.

[35] Marx goes on to say that man 'treats himself as the actual, living species . . . he treats himself as a *universal* and therefore a free being' (*MECW* 3: 275, Marx's emphasis). Allen Wood's translation makes this point more clearly: man 'behaves toward, is conscious of or relates to . . . himself as to the present, living species'. Ibid., 18.

[36] Ibid., 17.

[37] Geoff Boucher, *Understanding Marxism* (Durham: Acumen, 2012), 19-20.

same time.[38] This might be what Marx means when he writes in *The Poverty of Philosophy* that 'all history is nothing but a continuous transformation of human nature' (*MECW* 6: 192). While human nature may be constantly transformed, it is by now clear that for Marx there is a kind of trans-historical human nature which does not change, and it centres around productive labour.

5.1.2 Socialism: Utopian and Scientific

The second claim we are examining is that there is nothing "utopian" in Marxian communism; those who make it deny that Marx and Engels are ideal state theorists. We will find that Marx and Engels are actually engaged in a utopian project. As we noted in Chapter 2, Marx and Engels described themselves as "scientific" socialists, in part to distinguish themselves from the utopian socialists.[39] To understand the differences, such as they are, between utopian and scientific socialism, we will briefly explore who the utopian socialists were, and how Marx and Engels criticised them. Then we will explore Marx and Engels's utopian characteristics more closely. The utopian socialists fall into Leopold's category of 'forward-looking' socialism, mentioned above; they identify the ideal society with future developments. The most famous of them are Henri Saint-Simon (1760-1825), Charles Fourier (1772-1837), and Robert Owen (1771-1858).[40] These three men do not form a cohesive "school" of thought, but they each attempted to find a solution to the social, economic, and cultural disruption caused by the French Revolution and the industrial revolution.[41] The *Manifesto*'s criticism of the utopian socialists is brief; Marx and Engels describe their

---

[38] Sayers, *Marx and Alienation*, 81-82.

[39] As Marx himself put it, the term "scientific socialism" is 'used only in contrast to utopian socialism which wishes to foist new illusions onto the people instead of confining its scientific investigations to the social movement created by the people itself' (*Notes on Bakunin's* Statehood and Anarchy, *MECW* 24: 520). Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 24, Marx and Engels: 1874-83* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989).

[40] All three men describes themselves as propounding a science of social organisation, but they also speak in the tones of religious prophets, writing, as they saw it, in a time of cultural and religious vacuum. Saint-Simon, like Marx, bases his ideal state on a theory of history, which is divided into three epochs, the third of which is in its infancy. Fourier and Owen both argue that human nature has been fundamentally misunderstood and from a correct understanding of human nature we can produce the ideal state. Jonathan Beecher, "Early European Socialism," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. George Klosko (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 373; Frank E. Manuel, *The New World of Henri Saint-Simon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 220; Jonathan Beecher and Richard Bienvenu, eds., *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier: Selected Texts on Work, Love, and Passionate Attraction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 2; Robert Owen, *The Book of the New Moral World, Containing the Rational System of Society, Founded on Demonstrable Facts, Developing the Constitution and Laws of Human Nature and of Society* (London: E. Wilson, 1836), xix.

[41] Beecher, "Early European Socialism," 371.

proposals as 'of a purely Utopian character', and describe them as 'castles in the air', but do not go into a lot of detail (*MECW* 6: 516). They are using "Utopian" here in the pejorative sense we encountered in Chapter 1.

If we are seeking to contrast "utopian" and "scientific" socialism, the *Manifesto* is not really the best text for the purpose. While it has been claimed that the distinction of scientific socialism originated in the *Manifesto*,[42] and that it is 'that most innovative of sales brochures for "scientific socialism"',[43] it is at best an implicit distinction at this stage. The term "scientific socialism" is not found in the *Manifesto*. It was coined in 1840 by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon,[44] but it seems to have been first used in the published Marxian *oeuvre* in Engels's *Anti-Dühring* in 1878 (*MECW* 25: 271),[45] and then in more depth in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* in 1880 (*MECW* 24). In this latter work, Engels offers a well-informed and sympathetic interpretation of the utopian socialists' work, emphasising aspects of utopian socialism which anticipated Marx's critique of capitalism and dismissing much of the rest as fantasy.[46] Engels is interested in presenting the utopian socialists as intellectual predecessors to Marxian—that is, scientific—socialism. While he praises the utopians for their insights, he argues that the social systems they designed were 'foredoomed as Utopian; the more completely they were worked out in detail, the more they could not avoid drifting off into pure phantasies [sic]' (*MECW* 24: 290).[47] The main criticism Engels offers is that while utopian socialism criticises capitalism, it cannot *explain* it and, as a result, cannot master it: 'the more strongly this earlier Socialism denounced the exploitation of the working-class, inevitable under Capitalism, the less able was it clearly to show in what this exploitation consisted and how it arose' (*MECW* 24: 305). The key difference, on Engels's account,

---

[42] Gregory Claeys, "Socialism and Utopia," in *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*, ed. Roland Schaer, Gregory Claeys, and Lyman Tower Sargent (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with The New York Public Library, 2000), 206.

[43] Pedro Schwartz, "The *Communist Manifesto* and the Lure of Scientific Socialism," *Iberian Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 5, no. 2 (2018): 104.

[44] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What Is Property?*, ed. and trans. Donald R. Kelley and Bonnie G. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 209. Proudhon is perhaps best known nowadays for is slogan 'property is theft', ibid., 13.

[45] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 25: Frederick Engels: Anti-Dühring, Dialectics of Nature* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987). Marx had used the term in his *Notes on Bakunin's* Statehood and Anarchy, which he wrote in 1874-75. It was first published, in Russian, in 1926.

[46] Beecher, "Early European Socialism," 371.

[47] We will see later on that Marx and Engels are reluctant to give too much detail about their ideal state. Perhaps they want to avoid drifting off into fantasy. Engels's argument here is interesting when considered in connection with our discussion of the ideal state as a blueprint in Chapter 1; it seems to be the case that too *much* detail in a model of the ideal state can be as bad as too *little*.

between utopian and scientific socialism is that scientific socialism is able to explain capitalism as well as criticise it. The scientific, explanatory, basis for scientific socialism is provided by two discoveries which Engels credits to Marx: the materialistic conception of history, more familiarly called historical materialism, and the theory of surplus-value (*MECW* 24: 305). The theory of surplus-value is not worked out in the *Manifesto*, so we will not explore it here.[48] Historical materialism, on the other hand, is important to the *Manifesto*.

Historical materialism was first developed by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (*MECW* 5), which they wrote together in Brussels in 1845. Perhaps one of the clearest summaries of it comes from Marx's *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, published in 1859:

> It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production . . . From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure (*MECW* 29: 263).[49]

On this account, the mode of production is the mainspring from which social, political, and intellectual life evolve. As the mode of production changes, it comes into conflict with these other forces, and eventually forces a social revolution. This fits nicely into our discussion of species-being, earlier; Marx has a historical theory of how human nature is realised. Historical materialism gives primacy to economic factors in historical interpretation, and class struggle results from the development of economic factors.[50] It is particularly relevant for us to understand the historical process which underlies the Marxian ideal state. Historical materialism describes the mechanisms which have shifted societies from one state to another in the past, and will, according to Marx and Engels, shift society into the ideal state. However, the contention that historical materialism and the theory of surplus value make

---

[48] In a nutshell, surplus-value is the value left over once wages and operating costs have been paid. A worker might produce enough value to feed, clothe, and house themselves and their family in two hours; in the remaining hours of the working day they produce surplus-value. Surplus-value is not quite the same thing as profit; through luck or good management, a capitalist might manage to make a larger profit than they might otherwise, but the amount of surplus-value remains unchanged. W.A. Suchting, *Marx: An Introduction* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1983), 85.

[49] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 29, Marx: 1857-1861* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987).

[50] Claeys, *Marx and Marxism*, 98.

Marxian socialism *scientific*—as opposed to utopian—has been described as 'exceedingly disingenuous, even bordering on the intellectually dishonest'.[51]

Some other points of distinction between utopian and scientific socialism have been suggested, which are worth noting. One way to think of the difference is methodological: the utopian socialist visualises an imaginative abstraction from the divisions of class society, while the scientific socialist, the communist, visualises the future development of capitalist society into communist society.[52] It is for this reason that I suggested, at the beginning of the chapter, that it can be useful to think of Marx and Engels as proposing a diagnosis and prognosis regarding the development of capitalism, more than a problem and solution. Another way of thinking of the difference between utopian and scientific socialism is that scientific—Marxian—socialism uniquely identifies the proletariat as the driving force of historical change.[53] The difference might be that where utopian socialism is top-down, imposed upon society by a small group of intellectuals, scientific socialism is bottom-up. However, these differences are insufficient to render Marxian socialism a science and, by implication, render utopian socialism unscientific.

Marx and Engels left an 'ambiguous legacy' in which their attacks on utopianism accompany a clearly utopian project.[54] Though Marx and Engels use "utopian" in its pejorative sense, in discussing how they can be considered utopian we are shifting back to the more technical sense of proper utopian, as we discussed in Chapter 1. As we saw in Chapter 2, the Marxian project can be seen as dazzlingly utopian. Gregory Claeys describes Marx and Engels's utopian characteristics in some detail, identifying seven ways Marxian socialism can be considered utopian. These include a hostility to specialisation;[55] the assumption that social behaviour will improve significantly after private property is abolished;[56] and the assumption that society has one future goal—communism—which cannot be surpassed.[57] The

---

[51] Ibid., 232. Though this depends on how we understand "science". It is hardly fair to criticise Marx for using the term differently to the way we use it now.

[52] Vincent Geoghegan, *Utopianism and Marxism* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), 29.

[53] James Martin, "The Rhetoric of the *Manifesto*," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Communist Manifesto*, ed. Terrell Carver and James Farr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 54-55.

[54] Geoghegan, *Utopianism and Marxism*, 34.

[55] Claeys describes the all-round individual as 'utopia incarnate' for Marx. Interestingly, this is the exact opposite assumption to Plato's principle of specialisation.

[56] Recall that More makes this assumption as well, taking it as given that a whole host of social evils would vanish overnight if private property were abolished.

[57] Claeys, *Marx and Marxism*, 235-39.

"distinction" between utopian and scientific socialism is not as clear as Marx and particularly Engels would like us to believe. Though there are undoubtedly differences between Marxian and "utopian" socialism, they are not significant enough to justify thinking of Marxian socialism as a separate, "scientific" category. Lenin claimed that there is no trace of utopianism in Marx, in the sense of imagining a new society. That claim is inaccurate; Marxian socialism is just as utopian in this sense as anything imagined by the utopian socialists.

5.1.3 Description and Prediction

The final claim in the argument that Marx and Engels do not count as ideal state theorists is that they are making predictions of what *will* happen, not prescriptions of what *should* happen. That is, they say the socialist revolution is coming, but they do not advocate for it; they are neutral about whether or not the revolution *should* happen. We dealt with this claim in Chapter 2: the *Manifesto* is clearly normative, not merely predictive. Like Hobbes and Rousseau, there is an element in Marx and Engels's project of describing how a rational state *ought* to be constructed. We can see the prescriptive force most clearly in the last paragraph of the *Manifesto*, which I quote here in full:

> The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!
> (*MECW* 6: 519)

The tension between prediction and prescription in the Marxian ideal state is fairly easy to resolve. However, there is another tension in the *Manifesto* which is worth noting, because it is a tension at the heart of how Marx and Engels describe the local problem, which their ideal state resolves. This is the tension between description and *prediction*. On the one hand, Marx and Engels claim to be merely describing conditions as they appear; their conclusions 'merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes' (*MECW* 6: 498). On the other hand, they sometimes seem to be describing conditions which are yet to come, and it is not always clear whether they are describing or predicting. As Liedman puts it, 'the tense is at

once the present and the future'.[58] For example, Marx and Engels describe the epoch of the bourgeoisie as having 'simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat' (*MECW* 6: 486). This looks like a description of an ongoing process. However, later they say that 'the bourgeoisie has at last . . . conquered for itself, in the modern representative State, exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' (*MECW* 6: 486). This is a much stronger claim, which seems to describe present conditions. Similarly, Marx and Engels describe things as though they have already occurred but which are actually predictions. For instance, they describe the process of centralisation which occurs under bourgeois capitalism, where the population is collected together, the means of production is centralised, and property ownership is concentrated to a minority. Marx and Engels argue that 'the necessary consequence of this was political centralisation. Independent, or but loosely connected provinces with separate interests, laws, government and systems of taxation, became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class-interest, one frontier and one customs-tariff' (*MECW* 6: 488-89). This could be an accurate depiction of Britain, and perhaps of France. However, when we look at Germany, Italy, and the Habsburg Empire as they were in 1848 this claim is simply false.[59] The component parts of the Habsburg Empire, for instance,[60] were a collection of separate provinces, each with their own rights and privileges, different forms of administration, different types of taxation, and widely differing legal systems.[61] The Habsburg Empire was, in many ways, central to the conservative European system.[62] It is important to understand that Marx and Engels are not really describing the present here; they are describing the future which awaits with rapid industrialisation,[63] using Britain and France as the models and assuming that what had happened there would happen similarly across Europe.[64]

---

[58] Liedman, *A World to Win*, 235.

[59] When we say "Germany" and "Italy" we are of course not referring to a single, unified country. Germany in the mid-nineteenth century consisted of no fewer than 39 states, Italy 7. Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848-1851*, Second ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 94.

[60] Modern Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, as well as parts of Italy, Poland, Croatia, former Yugoslavia, Romania, and Ukraine.

[61] Sperber, *Revolutions*, 31.

[62] Rapport, *1848*, 3.

[63] Liedman, *A World to Win*, 227.

[64] Eric Hobsbawm, *How to Change the World: Marx and Marxism 1840-2011* (London: Little, Brown, 2011), 112.

5.2 The Philosophical Problem: Alienated Labour

I have argued that Marx and Engels do in fact offer a model of the ideal state; I now move to discuss the local problems which their ideal state solves; we are looking here at the diagnosis for the ideal state to resolve. The Marxian ideal state is proposed as a solution to two major local problems: alienated labour and the "social question" of social conditions in the mid-nineteenth century. For ease of reference, I will refer to these as the *philosophical* problem and the *historical* problem respectively, though there is not as neat a division between them as these names suggest. The philosophical problem as identified by Marx and Engels was of course affected—indeed, it was caused—by historical factors, and philosophical factors played into the Marxian diagnosis of the historical problem as well as its projected prognosis. We will deal with the philosophical problem first, which will set us up well to discuss the historical problem and Marx's solutions.

The concept of alienation is closely tied up with Marx's account of human nature; the two concepts are integral to Marx's exploration and critique of capitalism.[65] The English word "alienation" as Marx uses it has an economic or legal sense of the sale of a commodity or relinquishing of freedom.[66] As with much of the theoretical background to his work, Marx gets the concept of alienation from Hegel, and uses it to refer to a situation in which our own activities and products take on an independent existence and become hostile to us.[67] Alienated labour is a unique historical moment, predicated on specific social and economic conditions.[68] In general, we do not control or choose the way in which our humanity is expressed, under conditions of alienated labour. In the *Manuscripts*, Marx distinguishes four aspects of alienation—to put it another way, he identifies four aspects to the philosophical local problem which his ideal state will solve. Sayers and Byron describe these aspects as: alienation from the object of labour; from the *activity* of labour; from our species-being; and from our social relationships.[69] We take each of these aspects in turn. We are alienated from

---

[65] James Morgan, "Species Being in the Twenty-First Century," *Review of Political Economy* 30, no. 3 (2018): 377-78.

[66] Sayers, *Marx and Alienation*, ix.

[67] Ibid., 5.

[68] Byron, "Essence and Alienation," 385. Though there may be something unique about the way labour is alienated under capitalism, the claim that pre-capitalist labour was *not* alienated seems to be implausible. It is difficult to see how slave labour or medieval serfdom could be anything other than alienated. Marx might respond that even under feudal conditions, the serf has more control over their labour than the modern proletarian worker. This seems somewhat dubious, however. But, we should remember that we are not seeking to correct Marx's errors in this project.

[69] Sayers, *Marx and Alienation*, 81-82.; Byron, "Essence and Alienation," 386-87.

the object of labour—which, for Marx is the objectification or embodiment of labour; labour *made into* an object—in that it is external to us, and does not belong to us (*MECW* 3: 272). We are also alienated from the *activity* of labour, because it is not free activity, and because it is not free, we cease to be fully human. Under conditions of alienated labour, we do not choose to produce, but we produce because we are forced to. We work for wages because, if we do not, we will starve. Alienated labour, then, is not satisfying a need, it is a means to satisfy needs external to the labour. As evidence for this, Marx notes that when we are not compelled to work (under alienated conditions), it is 'shunned like the plague' (*MECW* 3: 274). Alienated labour does not belong to the worker, but to someone else. As a result, Marx argues that we feel most free in our purely animal functions—eating, drinking, and so on—and in exercising our most human functions we feel like animals (*MECW* 3: 274). Alienated workers feel that they have the most control, the most freedom, over their purely animal functions, for example perhaps in that they choose what and when to eat (to an extent), whereas their work is taken out of their control. Reducing labour to its animal character, making it a mere means to satisfy animal ends, alienates us from our species-being.[70] As a consequence of this, we are alienated from the rest of our species—that is, from other people.[71] When we produce, we do so for ourselves, not for other people. For example, consider a carpenter. Under unalienated conditions, a carpenter makes a chair for someone else; when labour is alienated the same carpenter makes the same chair in order to earn a wage for themselves. This aspect of alienation relates to our earlier discussion about human nature. Byron argues that, alienation from our species-being (and from our species) posits a trans-historical kind of human nature; this kind of alienation requires an enduring human nature which does not change.[72] On Byron's account, if human nature is nothing but the totality of social relations, then alienation is impossible, as there is no enduring thing to be alienated from.[73]

The key point here is that, under conditions of alienated labour, our key human characteristic is made into a mere means to an end. When labour is alienated, we labour so that we can afford to survive. Labour then becomes the means to the most basic of ends: our life activity, what Marx calls our 'essential being', becomes a means to maintaining our existence (*MECW*

---

[70] Sayers, *Marx and Alienation*, 81.
[71] Byron, "Essence and Alienation," 387.
[72] This kind of enduring human nature could not just be our animal natures, for that is not *human* nature.
[73] Byron, "Essence and Alienation," 388. If human nature is just the ensemble of social relations, it cannot be made foreign to us—it cannot be alienated.

3: 276). The ideas of species-being and alienated labour are important to Marx's critiques of capitalism, though it is interesting to note, as an aside, that he had not yet seen a factory by the time he wrote the *Manuscripts*.[74] The alienation of labour under capitalism is the philosophical problem which Marx uses the ideal state to solve.

It might be useful to consider Marx's account of alienated labour in comparison with Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. According to Maslow's system, once basic needs are satisfied, higher needs emerge.[75] The highest need in the hierarchy is the need for self-actualisation, which Maslow describes as 'the desire to become more and more what one idiosyncratically is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming'.[76] There are two interesting comparisons with Marx to make. Earlier I noted that Marx describes people only truly producing in freedom from physical needs (*MECW* 3: 276). This might plausibly describe the same process Maslow describes, where our basic needs generate new needs: we cannot satisfy our self-actualising needs if our basic needs, like hunger, are still unmet. The other interesting comparison is that alienated labour inverts Maslow's hierarchy: our self-actualising need (reading self-actualising as being roughly synonymous with Marx's account of species-being) is made subordinate to our most basic human needs, and in order to satisfy our basic needs we must satisfy our self-actualising need, but we do not control the way this need is satisfied. The comparison with Maslow gives us a useful visual metaphor for understanding the importance of alienation; his hierarchy of needs is commonly visualised as a triangle or pyramid, and alienated labour turns the pyramid on its head.

Before we turn to the social conditions and the historical problem which the Marxian ideal state solves, we should note another interesting contrast between Marx and Engels and the other ideal state theorists we have investigated. So far we have seen accounts of the ideal state presented as a general solution to the problem of social organisation; recall that I argue they are better read as particular solutions to local problems. Marx, however makes at least some attempt to restrict his ideal state to his particular context of Western Europe. In about November 1877 he wrote that a critic had misinterpreted his work in applying it to Russia, saying that he had 'metamorphose[d] my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophical theory of general development, imposed by

---

[74] Claeys, *Marx and Marxism*, 62.
[75] Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, Third ed. (New York: Longman, 1970), 17.
[76] Ibid., 22.

fate on all peoples, whatever the historical circumstances in which they are placed'. Marx declared that 'this does me too much honour, and yet puts me to shame at the same time' (*MECW* 24: 200). The restriction Marx makes here is not explicitly made in the *Manifesto*. It is perhaps implied by phrases like 'a spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism' (*MECW* 6: 481), or that 'the Communists turn their attention chiefly to Germany' (*MECW* 6: 519). On the other hand, some comments seem to have a global application—or at least an application in what we would now call "the West". For example, Marx argues that 'the need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere' (*MECW* 6: 487), and that 'modern industrial labour, modern subjection to capital, the same in England as in France, in America as in Germany, has stripped him [the proletarian] of every trace of national character' (*MECW* 6: 494). Finally, there is the famous closing line of the *Manifesto*: 'WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!' (*MECW* 6: 519). Perhaps Marx felt that this sounded better than a call for the working men of Europe to unite. It is interesting that Marx recognises his solution does not apply generally. However, the ideal state he proposes in the *Manifesto* is even more particular in its application than Marx admits, as we will see.

5.3 The Historical Problem: The Social Question and the Hungry Forties

We have discussed the philosophical problem of alienated labour, now we can examine the historical problem of the "social question".[77] It is worth remembering that socialism in the early nineteenth century can be defined by its focus on the social question, as we saw earlier this describes a broad range of possible approaches. In this section we will discuss what the "social question" is, and explore some of the major currents of the 1840s, the so-called "hungry forties". Compared with the previous sections, these sections on the historical problem and the Marxian ideal state are relatively brief, but that is because the Marxian ideal state is described only very briefly in the *Manifesto*. In other chapters we have been able to go into some detail about the institutions which the ideal state prescribes and the aspects of the local problem which they aim to resolve, but in this case we are given much less material to work with. The social question was a pan-European phenomenon, so we begin this section

---

[77] This phrase was used in the nineteenth century, as well as in later discussions. One of its first appearances was in an article by Charles Nodier in the Paris *Revue Politique* in May 1831. Holly Case, "The "Social Question", 1820-1920," *Modern Intellectual History* 13, no. 3 (2016): 753.

with a brief exploration of social conditions across Europe. We will then explore why we need to focus on a particular formulation of the social question in England, not on the Continent.

The social question, in a nutshell, is the question of the existence of poverty.[78] To completely solve the social question, then, would be to eradicate poverty. Hal Draper describes the social question as 'the plight of the masses of people in the new society of growing industry and bourgeoisification, and the need to do something about it'.[79] In the thirty years or so since the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, the population of Europe had grown,[80] but the economy had not grown with it. Industrial capitalism would eventually stimulate economic growth and raise living standards, but the effects of this did not become apparent until after 1850.[81] The social question was of particular importance during the 1840s. From 1840, Europe suffered a fifteen-year period of economic difficulties, the most severe of which were the years 1845-47, which saw three interrelated crises: poor harvests; an economic recession; and a financial and banking panic.[82] In 1845, wheat and potato harvests failed.[83] In France in 1846, production fell by about a third.[84] Poor harvests had significant economic effects. Poorer households around 1850 spent between two-thirds and three-quarters of household income on food;[85] a reduced food supply led to rising prices, as a result of which households had less income to spend on non-food items.[86] Poor living conditions made things worse. Housing conditions, with narrow streets, open drains, and inadequate water and sewage systems, contributed to the high mortality rate: fully half of all children died before the age of five, and the average life expectancy was about forty years.[87] Further, the crowded conditions in industrial cities provided fertile ground for disease; for example, cholera appeared in Europe

---

[78] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin, 2006), 50.

[79] Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, vol. I: State and Bureucracy (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), 97.

[80] England went from 5.8 million in 1750 to 8.7 million in 1800, and 16.7 million by 1850. France and Germany show similar patterns: France's population went from 29 million in 1800 to 35.9 million by the middle of the century. Germany's 24.5 million in 1800 reached 35 million by 1850. Hinde, *England's Population*, 183.

[81] Rapport, *1848*, 30.

[82] Sperber, *Revolutions*, 109.

[83] Rapport, *1848*, 36.

[84] Priscilla Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848: A Social History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952), 18.

[85] Helge Berger and Mark Spoerer, "Economic Crises and the European Revolutions of 1848," *The Journal of Economic History* 61, no. 2 (2001): 296.

[86] Robert Justin Goldstein, "Comparing the European Revolutions of 1848 and 1989," *Society* 44 (2007): 156.

[87] Josef Polišenský, *Aristocrats and the Crowd in the Revolutionary Year 1848: A Contribution to the History of Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Austria* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1980), 39.

for the first time in 1832.[88] It is worth noting that Liverpool and Manchester had the highest population density in the world in the 1840s. The average population density for England and Wales was 275 people per square mile; Liverpool had a density of 138,224 people per square mile, and Manchester had a density of 100,000.[89] The economic pressures of the 1840s made the social question more acute.

Social conditions across Europe were rapidly approaching crisis point during the 1840s. The revolutions of 1848 are a good illustration of how pressing social issues were at the time. In January 1848 Alexis de Tocqueville warned the French Chamber of Deputies that 'we are at this moment sleeping on a volcano'.[90] The revolutions of 1848 broke out in February, when the French monarchy was overthrown; the revolution rapidly spread across Europe.[91] The revolutions were ultimately unsuccessful, and one of the most important factors in the ultimate collapse of the liberal regimes which had overthrown the conservative order was the continued plight of urban poverty.[92] Liberals, content with their gains, were reluctant to make major social concessions, causing the working classes to abandon the liberal cause and allowing the conservatives to regain the upper hand.[93] The principal legacy of the revolutions of 1848 was the intervention of the working classes in shaping historical events.[94]

There is a strong correlation between economic crisis and revolution. In England and Sweden, for instance, there was neither economic crisis nor revolution.[95] Wilson suggests that there are two broad explanations for why Britain went without a revolution in 1848. The first is that the British state had developed a strong authority over its people by means of law, policing, and military strength. The other is that while conditions for many in the 1840s was

---

[88] Rapport, *1848*, 35. Wilson poetically describes the population collapsing 'before the imperial invasion of King Cholera'. Britain was not protected from this invasion; outbreaks occurred there in 1832, 1848-49, 1853-54, and 1866. The 1848-49 epidemic, for instance, killed 60,000 people in Great Britain. A.N. Wilson, *The Victorians* (London: Hutchinson, 2002), 36, 74.

[89] Jeremy Black and Donald M. MacRaild, *Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 88.

[90] Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis De Tocqueville*, trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (London: The Harvill Press, 1948), 13.

[91] The first outbreak of revolution in 1848 was in fact in January, in Milan, but the fall of the French monarchy was the first great blow to the conservative regimes of Europe. Rapport, *1848*, 43, 59.

[92] "Liberal", in this context, is perhaps best understood as "constitutional monarchist", which is how these liberals tended to describe themselves at the time. Sperber, *Revolutions*, 65.

[93] Rapport, *1848*, 261.

[94] István Mészáros, "The Legacy of 1848 and the Dilemmas of Democratic Revolutions," in *The Social Question and the Democratic Revolution: Marx and the Legacy of 1848*, ed. Douglas Moggach and Paul Leduc Browne (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2000), 43.

[95] Berger and Spoerer, "Economic Crises," 295, 315.

appallingly bad, they could have been worse, and that hardship was replaced by prosperity relatively quickly.[96] Also important to note is Hobsbawm's analysis of the unequal development of Britain and continental Europe; they were not developing at the same rate. The continent faced its most acute crisis in 1846-48; the equivalent point for Britain had been reached in 1841-42. By 1848 a new period of economic expansion was underway in Britain.[97]

Britain, or specifically England,[98] is where we will direct most of our attention for the rest of this chapter. Though Marx and Engels make at least some attempt to restrict the application of their ideal state to Western Europe, it is actually a particular solution to social problems in England. This might seem somewhat surprising, given that Marx and Engels barely mention England in the *Manifesto*, and in fact explicitly refer their attention to Germany, which they argue is 'on the eve of a bourgeois revolution . . . [which] will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution' (*MECW* 6: 519). Before we examine the claim that England is the focus of Marx and Engels's ideal state, we should remember a couple of points. Throughout this thesis we have made the distinction between what an author says they are doing and what they are actually doing; we often do not take them at their word. Further, we noted earlier that there is a tension in the *Manifesto* between description and prediction. The application to Germany is based on the prediction that it will soon erupt into revolution, and Marx and Engels think that these revolutions will resolve particular social problems. The problems they describe, and the solutions to them, are based on conditions they observed in England.

We need to focus on conditions in England because it is English conditions which inform the analysis in the *Manifesto*. Much of the historical and economic analysis in the *Manifesto* draws on earlier work by Engels. Marx wrote the *Manifesto* between December 1847 and January 1848, and relied heavily on a work by Engels called *Principles of Communism* (*MECW* 6), a catechism of 25 questions and answers. Much of the economic and historical analysis of the *Principles* summarises Engels's earlier work, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (*MECW* 4), which he wrote in 1845.[99] George R. Boyer notes that the fact

---

[96] Wilson, *The Victorians*, 113.

[97] Hobsbawm, *Change the World*, 97. The British equivalent of the 1848 revolutions was the Chartist general strike in 1842.

[98] I will refer to England specifically, for two reasons. Marx and Engels refer to England, and I am following their lead here, and more importantly industrial capitalism evolved differently in England compared with Scotland and Ireland.

[99] Boyer, "Historical Background," 154.

that so much of the analysis in the *Manifesto* is rooted in Engels's work on English working conditions suggests that England formed the model for their analysis.[100] The other reason why we are focused on England rather than Continental Europe is that the conditions of capitalism which Marx and Engels describe in the *Manifesto* did not exist on the Continent in 1848, except for in a few small areas. Engels wrote that 'only in England can the proletariat be studied in all its relations and from all sides' (*Condition*, *MECW* 4: 307).[101] In order to see how England was the only country in Europe with a recognisable proletariat by 1848, we need first to understand the two classes whose struggle dominates capitalism and the transition into socialism: bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Marx and Engels define classes by their relationship to the means of production rather than self-image, skill levels, or prospects in life.[102] We encountered the term "bourgeoisie" in Chapter 2, in our discussion of Genevan politics. For Marx and Engels, bourgeoisie is an essentially economic designation. In a footnote to the 1888 English edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, Engels defines the bourgeoisie as 'the class of modern Capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage-labour' (*MECW* 6: 482n). The proletariat is the opposing class to the bourgeoisie: they are 'the class of modern wage-labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour-power in order to live' (*MECW* 6: 482n). In addition to selling labour-power, Hal Draper identifies the production of surplus-value as one of the key characteristics of the proletariat.[103] The distinction between selling *labour* and selling *labour-power*, a key distinction to the theory of surplus-value,[104] has not yet been made in the *Manifesto*. That innovation would have to wait

---

[100] Ibid., 156.

[101] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 4, Marx and Engels: 1844-45* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975). In late 1842, Engels had been sent by his father to England, to get some practical experience at the family factory in Manchester. On his return to Germany in 1844, Engels published a scathing indictment of early industrial capitalism, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (*Condition*, hereafter), which has been described as one of the best books on working-class life ever written. Boyer, "Historical Background," 151., Peter Worsley, *Marx and Marxism*, Revised ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 21.

[102] Cowling, *The Communist Manifesto: New Interpretations*, 2.

[103] Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, vol. 2: The Politics of Social Classes (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), 34.

[104] Marx defines labour-power, or capacity for labour, as 'the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use value of any description' (*Capital Vol I*, *MECW* 35:177). Liedman gives a good explanation of why the distinction between labour and labour-power is important: the worker sells their labour-power to the capitalist for a certain time and in exchange for wages. But the labour the worker does has a greater value than the wage. Thus, the worker creates *surplus* value. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 35: Karl Marx, Capital Vol I* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1996); Liedman, *A World to Win*, 413.

until Marx's exile to England, where he gained access to the British Library and was able to devote more time to studying political economy.[105]

The proletariat is key to Marx and Engels's analysis of capitalism, and continental Europe did not have a developed proletariat at the time they wrote the *Manifesto*. The most common example of a proletarian worker is an industrial worker. They are an important part of the proletariat, though they are not the *whole* of the proletariat: Marx and Engels argue that the bourgeoisie has 'converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers' (*MECW* 6: 487). Let us keep the focus on industrial workers for the moment. Industrial workers in the 1840s could be found in only a few areas. They were mostly in Britain, but there were growing industrial populations in Belgium and France. In Germany they were few and far between, with a few exceptions like Schleswig and some of the Rhine provinces.[106] By and large, Europe was a continent of peasants. In France in 1851, 64 percent of the population was involved in agriculture.[107] As we look east and south this proportion increases to 85 percent in some of the eastern provinces of the Austrian Empire; 89 percent in the south of Italy.[108] Marx thinks peasants are one of the reactionary groups who 'try to roll back the wheel of history', seeking to preserve their existence as 'fractions of the middle class' (*MECW* 6: 494).[109] The proletariat, therefore, did not really exist in continental Europe in 1848. Given Marx and Engels's desire to explain industrial capitalism

---

[105] Hobsbawm, *Change the World*, 109.

[106] Liedman, *A World to Win*, 225.

[107] By contrast, 23.7% of England's workforce in 1851 were engaged in agriculture. Though this was the largest single occupation, the secondary sector (manufacturing, construction, and so on) as a whole made up some 42.6% of the workforce. Leigh Shaw-Taylor and E.A. Wrigley, "Occupational Structure and Population Change," in *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain*, ed. Roderick Floud, Jane Humphries, and Paul Johnson, vol. I: 1700-1870 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 69.

[108] Sperber, *Revolutions*, 5.

[109] On one tempting reading, Marx is contemptuous about peasants—and, indeed, there is no doubt that Marx shared the common urban contempt for, and ignorance of, rural conditions. In the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* Marx compares peasants to 'a sack of potatoes' (*MECW* 11: 187), and in the *Manifesto* he refers contemptuously to 'the idiocy of rural life' (*MECW* 6: 488). On this account, we can confidently conclude that Marx considered the peasants to be essentially reactionary. However, there is another way of thinking about Marx's attitude to peasants. The word 'idiocy' is an inelegant translation of the German word 'Idiotismus'. This word refers not to stupidity but to narrow horizons, someone who cares for their own affairs more than those of the wider community. It is rooted in the Ancient Greek word *idiōtes*, a meaning of which the classically-educated Marx would have been aware. The quote from the *Eighteenth Brumaire* is illuminating in its full context, too. There, Marx says that 'the great mass of the French nation is formed by simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes' (*MECW* 11: 187). These two quotes suggest that, for Marx, peasants are fundamentally discrete units; they do not form a coherent class, with an accompanying class consciousness. Wilson blames Engels and the 'plodder' Samuel Moore, who translated the *Manifesto* into English, for the error. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 11, Marx and Engels: 1851-53* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979); Hobsbawm, *Change the World*, 108; Wilson, *The Victorians*, 120.

as well as to critique it, their focus and ours must remain on England rather than the Continent.

5.4 Economic Analysis in Engels's *Condition* and Marx's *Manifesto*

We have noted that Marx and Engels take a slightly different approach to articulating their model of the ideal state than the other thinkers we have been investigating. The Marxian approach is to diagnose the problem and describe its projected prognosis, which culminates in the realisation of the ideal state. They do this because Marx and Engels take themselves to be describing a historical process, where class conflict will eventually bring about a new, radically different, form of society. What they are actually doing is prescribing a particular solution to social problems in England. In this section we will examine the experience of the English proletariat, as part of an unprecedented experiment in industrial capitalism which took place there in the mid-nineteenth century.[110] To be precise, we will examine how Engels perceived the experience of the English proletariat in Manchester. As we noted, much of the historical and economic analysis in the *Manifesto* relies on Engels's *Condition of the Working Class in England*. A number of observations in the *Manifesto* mirror ones made in the *Condition*. It will be useful, then, to look at those remarks side by side. We will find that much of the Marxian diagnosis of the historical problem, which the ideal state solves, is based on Engels's observations of working conditions in England. To make comparison easier, in this section I will treat Marx as though he is the sole author of the *Manifesto*, so that we can compare what Marx says (in the *Manifesto*, *MECW* 6) with what Engels says (in the *Condition*, *MECW* 4). This comparison is presented in approximately the same order that the remarks are made in the *Manifesto*.

As we noted earlier, in capitalist society there are two classes, bourgeoisie and proletariat. This is in marked contrast to the society which preceded capitalism—feudalism—which had 'a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank' (*MECW* 6: 482-85). Bourgeois society, however, has simplified class antagonisms into two 'great hostile camps . . . facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat' (*MECW* 6: 485).

---

[110] Colin Matthew, "Introduction: The United Kingdom and the Victorian Century, 1815-1901," in *The Nineteenth Century: The British Isles, 1815-1901*, ed. Colin Matthew (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3. I talk about England as opposed to Britain for two reasons. Marx and Engels talk about England and I am following their convention, also the experience of industrial capitalism was different in England compared with Scotland or Ireland.

This two-class order does not fit well with Continental Europe, which as we saw above was a continent of peasants in the mid-nineteenth century. However, Engels makes a similar point in the *Condition*, claiming that 'there exist here [in England] only a rich and a poor class, for the lower middle-class vanishes more completely with every passing day' (*MECW* 4: 326). This analysis is over-simplified. George Boyer identifies three different "middle classes" in England, each with different income and outlook: the capitalist middle class; the lower middle class (shopkeepers, clerks, and so on); and the professional middle class (doctors, clergy, lawyers, public officials).[111] Here the tension between description and prediction is on display; at the same time we have only two classes, bourgeoisie and proletariat, and we have additional classes which are being forced into either of those two. Society is portrayed as a huge centrifuge; some are pushed upwards into the bourgeoisie, while most are pushed down into the proletariat.[112] Importantly, remember, Marx and Engels define class *solely* by relation to the means of production. This means they can simply deny that what Boyer calls the lower and professional middle classes are anything other than proletarian. As we saw earlier, in the *Manifesto* Marx says that the bourgeoisie has 'converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers' (*MECW* 6: 487).[113] What this shows is that a foundational feature of Marxian analysis reflects Marx and Engels's perception of English society. While the general point is about the transition from feudalism to capitalism by the commodification of labour, the capitalist system they describe was to be found mostly in England in 1848.

Both Marx and Engels describe how the bourgeoisie has used its economic supremacy to exploit the proletariat. Marx describes the bourgeoisie as having 'resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom—Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation' (*MECW* 6: 487). Engels makes a similar point, that the proletariat, left to themselves, is helpless and dependent on the bourgeoisie. He concludes that 'the proletarian is, therefore, in law and in fact, the slave of the bourgeoisie, which can decree his life or death. It offers him the means of living, but only for an "equivalent", for his work. It even lets

---

[111] Boyer, "Historical Background," 170.
[112] Liedman, *A World to Win*, 234.
[113] Marx does not say how the physician and so on have been converted into wage-labourers, only that they *have* been converted. The most likely explanation is that they have to work for a wage in order to avoid starving—a key aspect of alienated labour, as we saw earlier.

him have the appearance of acting from a free choice, of making a contract with free, unconstrained consent, as a responsible agent who has attained his majority' (*MECW* 4: 376).[114] In this connection, Engels notes that 'the bourgeoisie has gained a monopoly of all means of existence . . . [and] is protected in its monopoly by the power of the state' (*MECW* 4: 376). This is reminiscent of Marx's remark that 'the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' (*MECW* 6: 486). The dependence of the proletariat on the bourgeoisie, and the power of the state to protect that dependence, is chillingly illustrated by the Irish potato famine, which killed a quarter of the Irish population by 1848.[115] It is worth quoting Priscilla Robertson at length here:

> the government of the richest kingdom in the world had failed to prevent starvation and fever among part of its own people who lived on a food-producing island, from which, even during the famine years, more than enough grain and meat was exported to keep all its own people healthy. Only the potato crop failed, potatoes on which the Irish peasantry had always nourished themselves while the meat and grain were sent out of the country to pay the landlords' rent. . . . England had recently discovered the laws of the market; to withhold rents from the Irish landlords would interfere with the principles of economics. So the meat and grain were shipped off, under armed guard, and the Irish peasants lay back in their hovels or their ditches and starved.[116]

In the case of the Irish famine, the bourgeoisie claimed they could not provide relief to the Irish because that would interfere with free trade. A.N. Wilson notes that the same principle was at stake with respect to measures to mitigate cholera outbreaks: such measures could not be introduced without increasing state controls, and 'the true laissez-faire liberal would, quite literally, prefer death to state interference'.[117]

Conditions of labour under capitalism—in bourgeois society, in other words—are conditions of alienated labour. That means, remember, that what Marx considers the human 'life activity' is made into a mere means to an end: we labour in order to survive. Under such conditions, the proletariat is dehumanised, and transformed from a group of people into a

---

[114] In *Principles of Communism*, Engels describes the condition of the proletariat as worse than slavery, as 'the slave is sold once and for all, the proletarian has to sell himself by the say and by the hour' (*MECW* 6: 343-44). Marx writes that the proletariat 'who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce' (*MECW* 6: 490).

[115] Indeed, because of death, emigration, and depressed population growth, Ireland's population shrank from 8 million in 1845 to 4.5 million in 1901. Black and MacRaild, *Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 57.

[116] Robertson, *Revolutions*, 407. Potatoes had become popular among the Irish peasantry from about the middle of the seventeenth century; by 1845 they were the chief food of about forty percent of the Irish population. Leslie Clarkson and Margaret Crawford, *Feast and Famine: Food and Nutrition in Ireland 1500-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 59-61.

[117] Wilson, *The Victorians*, 157.

commodity, which is 'exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market' (*MECW* 6: 490). Engels describes improvements in technology, which in a 'well-ordered state of society' should be cause for rejoicing, but in the 'war of all against all',[118] this is not the case: 'every improvement in machinery throws workers out of employment, and the greater the advance, the more numerous the unemployed; each great improvement produces, therefore, upon a number of workers the effect of a commercial crisis, creates want, wretchedness, and crime' (*MECW* 4: 429). Like More, Engels draws a direct connection between economic hardship and crime. Marx does not seem to make this connection, but *Principles of Communism* does not do so either. An interesting corollary to the commodification of labour is the increasing number of women in the workforce. Marx argues that women are drafted into labour as the need for physical strength and skill fades due to the development of machinery. Difference of age and sex, Marx says, 'have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class. All are instruments of labour, more or less expensive to use, according to their age and sex' (*MECW* 6: 491).

Towards the end of Section 1 of the *Manifesto*, Marx declares that 'in depicting the most general phases of the development of the proletariat, we traced the more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society, up to the point where that war breaks out into open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat' (*MECW* 6: 495). Engels, in a similar position in *Condition*, writes that 'we have now followed the proletariat of the British Islands through all branches of its activity, and found it everywhere living in want and misery under totally inhuman conditions. We have seen discontent arise with the rise of the proletariat, grow, develop, and organise; we have seen open bloodless and bloody battles of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie' (*MECW* 4: 561).

Finally, at the end of Section 1 of the *Manifesto*, Marx concludes that 'what the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable' (*MECW* 6: 496).[119] Relatively early in the *Condition*,

---

[118] It is worth noting that this is the phrase Hobbes uses to describe the state of nature. Whether Engels is making a deliberate reference to Hobbes is unclear.

[119] The description of the fall of the bourgeoisie as 'inevitable' is worth commenting on. Marx is not saying that the bourgeoisie's fall is determined, or fatalistic. Howard Sherman points out that there is no predetermined law of biological evolution, handed down from above, but it is possible to talk about a law of evolution and use that to explain the past or predict the future. Similarly, Sherman argues, we can talk about laws of social evolution. In this sense the fall of the bourgeoisie is inevitable because the conditions which will, on Marx's account, lead

Engels reaches a similar conclusion, describing 'the deep wrath of the whole working-class, from Glasgow to London, against the rich, by whom they are systematically plundered and mercilessly left to their fate'. This wrath will, he predicts, 'break out into a revolution in comparison with which the French Revolution . . . will prove to have been child's play' (*MECW* 4: 323). This describes the local problem, and the beginnings of the Marxian solution to it, in a nutshell: the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, which will eventually explode into revolution.

5.5 From Each According to His Abilities: The Communist Ideal State

Having explored the two aspects of the local problem, the philosophical problem of alienated labour and the historical problem of the social question, we can now try to show how Marx and Engels's ideal state proposes to resolve them. An interesting feature of the ideal state in the *Manifesto* is that it does not just show us the end point of future development, as Plato and More most clearly do, but it gives us some information on how existing society can be transformed from bourgeois society to communist society; this is the "prognosis" part of the "diagnosis-prognosis" way of thinking about the Marxian approach to describing the ideal state; we have considered their diagnosis for what is wrong with the society they observed, we now turn our attention to their projected prognosis. Communist society, the Marxian ideal state, is described in only a few sentences in the *Manifesto*. In this section we will explore both the way Marx and Engels describe the immediate changes to be brought about by the proletarian revolution, in order to explore the beginning of the solution to the local problem, and we will explore the communist ideal state itself, to see how the local problem is solved completely. The solution makes exploitation impossible, and creates a society in which class antagonisms, and the state as we know it, cease to exist. The lack of detail about the ideal state makes showing how it resolves the local problems challenging. In previous chapters we have been able to point to specific aspects of the ideal state and show how they resolve the local problem; we cannot do that in this case. However, we are able to comment on how the

---

to the proletarian revolution have been created, or are in the process of being created. Howard Sherman, "Marx and Determinism," *Journal of Economic Issues* 15, no. 1 (1981): 65. Regarding inevitability in Marx, we might also make an analogy with hydrogen. It is inevitable that hydrogen, under the right conditions, will explode. But it is by no means *determined* that any given quantity of hydrogen will actually explode, because it may never meet the right conditions. When Marx talks about inevitability, on this account, he is saying that the right conditions have been created, or are being created.

transformation from current society to the ideal state occurs, which is useful to see the problem begin to be solved.

The transformation from bourgeois society to communist society is achieved via the proletarian revolution; its first goal is 'to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy' (*MECW* 6: 504). This begins what Marx would later refer to as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', a phrase he used to describe the revolutionary socialism of the Parisians in 1848/1849.[120] More frequently, Marx refers to the 'rule of the proletariat', or 'political power held by the working class'; these are all synonymous.[121] Once in power, the proletariat will need 'to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, *i.e.*, of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible' (*MECW* 6: 504).

Marx and Engels acknowledge that the proletarian revolution will play out differently in different countries, but there are some measures which they expect to be applied generally. These include abolishing private property; a heavy progressive income tax; centralisation of credit, communications, and transport in the hands of the State; extension of industrial capacity; equal liability of all to labour and the creation of what Marx and Engels call 'industrial armies'; a gradual elimination of the distinction between town and country; and free public education for all children (*MECW* 6: 505). As an aside, it is interesting that Marx

---

[120] Hal Draper, "Joseph Weydemeyer's "Dictatorship of the Proletariat"," *Labor History* 3, no. 2 (1962): 210. "Dictatorship" is another loaded word; Draper argues that in the context of the mid-nineteenth century, the term was understood to refer to the ancient Roman office of dictator. That office was used in times of crisis, when the Roman consuls—the two heads of government under normal circumstances—could invest a single man with absolute power in order to resolve the crisis. This was not limited to foreign threats; the first dictator was appointed to resolve unrest in Rome itself. Critically, the dictatorship was a temporary appointment which expired after six months. During the French Revolution, when the term came into vogue again, if someone was accused of wanting a dictatorship, it was less of any anti-democratic connotation and more because the office was vested in a *single man*. Draper points out that a modern equivalent of the Roman dictatorship still exists, in the form of martial law. This can be imposed in an emergency, and shares the essential feature of the Roman device that it is underpinned by constitutional law, it is temporary, and while it can temporarily suspend laws it cannot create new ones. The dictatorship of the proletariat will presumably end as communist society proper is realised and classes cease to exist. When Bakunin expresses the opinion that the dictatorship of the proletariat will be 'provisional and brief', Marx responds: '*Non, mon cher!* —The *class rule* of the workers over the strata of the old world who are struggling against them can only last as long as the economic basis of class society has not been destroyed' (*Notes on Bakunin's* Statehood and Anarchy, *MECW* 24: 521). Mike Duncan, *The Storm before the Storm: The Beginning of the End of the Roman Republic* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2017), 8. Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, vol. 3: The 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), 13, 19-20.
[121] Monty Johnstone, "The Paris Commune and Marx's Conception of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," *The Massachusetts Review* 12, no. 3 (1971): 449.

and Engels, unlike More, do not explicitly abolish the money economy. Though they are dealing with broadly similar local problems—the divide between the "haves" and the "have nots"—it is an interesting contrast that More calls for money to be abolished and Marx and Engels are silent on that point. These measures are part of the dictatorship of the proletariat phase of the revolution; we have not yet entered the ideal state. They are intended to ease class tensions and forcibly break what Marx and Engels think of as the bourgeoisie's stranglehold on economic and political power—recall that they refer to the executive of the modern state as 'but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' (*MECW* 6: 486). This allows the revolution to continue, and for society to move into the ideal state.

Following the dictatorship of the proletariat, we enter into the communist ideal state proper. As noted above, the description of this state in the *Manifesto* is very brief, given in only a couple of paragraphs. In the Marxian ideal state, all production has been 'concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation' (*MECW* 6: 505), which causes the public power to lose its political character. For Marx and Engels, political power is 'merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another' (*MECW* 6: 505), so the ideal state is a classless society. In the dictatorship of the proletariat, the proletariat used a revolution to make itself the ruling class and change the existing conditions of production. For Marx and Engels, recall, classes are defined by their relation to the means of production. By revolutionising the conditions of production, everyone in the communist ideal state has the same relation to the means of production, and the proletariat will have abolished its own supremacy by removing the conditions under which class antagonisms (and classes generally) can exist. In place of bourgeois society, 'we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all' (*MECW* 6: 506). This is a society in which the state has 'withered away', as Engels describes it.[122]

Because Marx and Engels do not give a lot of detail in their description of the ideal state, it is difficult to explore exactly how the problems are solved. Recall that one of Engels's criticisms of the utopian socialists was that the more their descriptions of the ideal society were worked out in detail, the more they drifted into the realm of fantasy. If we try to

---

[122] Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1969), 333. The phrase 'withers away' is famous, which is why I have quoted this edition. The text of *Anti-Dühring* found in *MECW* 25: 268 uses the phrase: 'the state is not "abolished". *It dies out*'. Engels's emphasis.

extrapolate from the brief description we are given to work out just how the ideal state solves the problems of alienation and the social question, we will likely end up in the same difficulty. Therefore we cannot point to specific aspects of the ideal state and the local problem they resolve; we must confine ourselves to generalities.

We can be confident, though, that labour in the communist ideal state will not be alienated. The key reason for alienation is that the means of production are owned by the bourgeoisie; the proletariat sell their wage-labour but receive none of the profits their labour generates. In the ideal state, everyone stands in the same relation to the means of production, because the 'vast association of the whole nation' is responsible for all production, as noted earlier. Similarly, the historical problem, the social question, is also resolved by the Marxian ideal state. The abolition of class society makes the exploitation of one class by another impossible. By making everyone part of the workforce,[123] Marx and Engels aim to—like More—provide for everybody's basic needs. This might be part of what Marx means by 'an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all' (*MECW* 6: 506). It seems implausible that free development can take place while basic needs are unmet.

One of the criticisms of the Marxian ideal state is Marx and Engels's reluctance to predict the future; they are reluctant to describe the ideal state in detail. This is very different to the other ideal states we have looked at so far. The consistent theme has been a more or less detailed description of what the ideal society looks like, focusing on whichever features the author thinks most important. Marx and Engels refuse to do this. In the Afterword to the second German edition of *Capital*, Marx declines to write recipes 'for the cookshops of the future' (*MECW* 35: 17). Claeys suggests that Marx and Engels wanted to leave the move towards communism to the inexorable sweep of history and the discretion of those who were carrying out the revolution; Claeys describes this reluctance as annoying. He argues that the Marxian system relies on planning, which by definition involves imagining future needs; it is not

---

[123] Through expanding industrial capacity and making everyone equally liable to labour, measures imposed during the dictatorship of the proletariat. This includes at least some abolition of the division of labour. We noted above that the all-round individual is 'utopia incarnate' for Marx. The communist society comes into being 'after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour' (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*, *MECW* 24: 87), and 'nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow' (*The German Ideology*, *MECW* 5:47).

enough to provide a 'ruthless criticism of all that exists' (*Letters from* Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher, *MECW* 3: 142), we need alternatives.[124]

Though Claeys's irritation with Marx and Engels's reticence is understandable, it is worth noting that Marx and Engels give some *negative* descriptions of the future Communist society; that is, they describe what it is *not*. It is classless, without exploitation, and so on. These may not be sufficient to give a clear description of the ideal state, but they do help somewhat. Liedman suggests that fear of the fancifully-depicted utopias of the time might have inspired their reticence.[125] As we saw earlier, Engels criticises the utopian socialists for drifting off into fantasy as they work out their utopia in detail. Another explanation for Marx and Engels's reticence to describe the communist ideal state in detail comes from the most important negative description of all: it is a society *without alienation*. To describe such a society from within a society where alienated labour does exist may be nearly impossible. It is possible that Marx and Engels realise that there are limits to their imaginations, and they are unable to clearly imagine what communist society would look like in detail. The metamorphosis society undergoes is analogous to the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly; though we can say what species will emerge from the chrysalis, we cannot describe in detail the colours on its wings. The dictatorship of the proletariat provides the context for a revolutionary transformation of society which cannot be predicted in detail.

5.6 Conclusion

The reception of the *Communist Manifesto* was something of a disappointment. It was almost immediately overtaken by events—the *Manifesto* was published only weeks before the February Revolution in France toppled the monarchy and the ultimately failed revolutions of 1848 spread across Europe. For the two decades following the revolutions, the *Manifesto* was a nearly forgotten work.[126] Indeed, though we have explored its connection to the England of the mid-1840s, the *Manifesto* was largely unknown there until the 1890s.[127] It was republished in 1872, and from that date it became an important introduction to Marx's

---

[124] Claeys, *Marx and Marxism*, 234.
[125] Liedman, *A World to Win*, 238.
[126] Terrell Carver, "The *Manifesto* in Marx's and Engels's Lifetimes", in *The Cambridge Companion to the Communist Manifesto*, ed. Terrell Carver and James Farr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 68.
[127] Claeys, *Marx and Marxism*, 119.

thought as well as socialism in general.[128] After Marx's death in 1883 that the text began to acquire its iconic status, because, as Terrell Carver argues, 'in that decade and subsequent ones Marx became a series of texts, rather than a political actor'.[129]

In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, which he wrote in 1875, Marx gives probably the clearest indication of how he expected the communist ideal state to actually unfold.[130] There Marx describes a two-stage system, a lower and higher phase of communist society. In the higher phase,

> after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and thereby also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of common wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs! (MECW 24:87)

That phrase, as famous as any from the *Manifesto*, gives us an idea of the goal of the Marxian ideal state. By not giving details, Marx and Engels offer a simple message which can be shared easily and provides hope for those who wish to bring the ideal state into actual existence. On the other hand, the lack of detail means that there are many possible ways in which that ideal state could be actualised, and many different interpretations of what the communist ideal state really looks like.

The ideal state in the *Communist Manifesto* is a reaction and response to a particular formulation of the social question. It addresses social conditions in industrial England, and assumes that the rest of Europe will follow the same development that England did; for Marx particularly, England was the laboratory for working out his ideas of class relations, and during the 1840s England was creating the first authentic proletariat.[131] Seen in this light, the *Manifesto* is an excellent example of a particular solution that might apply generally; though it is a reaction to conditions in England, given similar circumstances it could solve problems elsewhere. The poverty and exploitative conditions Engels describes in his *Condition of the Working Class* are held up as the epitome of industrial capitalism, and the communist ideal

---

[128] Liedman, *A World to Win*, 242.
[129] Carver, "Lifetimes", 74.
[130] Claeys, *Marx and Marxism*, 203.
[131] Black and MacRaild, *Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 105.

state is proposed as a solution. Capitalism is inherently exploitative, forcing the proletariat to sell their labour in exchange for wages. This labour is alienated, so that our core human motivation is made into a mere means to an end: we labour in order to survive. In the communist ideal state, our basic needs will be taken care of as we collectively work. The communist ideal state spells an end to exploitation, and therefore an end to politics as we know it—for, as we saw above, Marx and Engels describe politics as just the capacity for one class to oppress another.

There are some striking similarities between More's ideal state and Marx and Engels's. They solve the problems they observed through economic means, as opposed to Hobbes's much more political focus—though Hobbes does have some interest in economic factors, his primary solutions are political—and we are interested in their perception of the problem more than the problem itself. As we saw, More diagnosed the result as the cause, attacking enclosure as a symptom of greed rather than as a response to economic depression, and Marx and Engels's analysis of industrial capitalism draws on Engels's personal acquaintance with industry in Manchester, with the not unreasonable inference that the rest of Europe will soon follow the same path. Both More and Marx and Engels propose an ideal state which abolishes private property.

6. Conclusion

By comparing some models of the ideal state with their historical context, I have sought to show that they are constructed in response to local problems as well as being guided by a particular conception of human nature. Thinking of the ideal state in this way gives a more complete understanding of how a model of the ideal state was constructed; almost in spite of themselves ideal state theorists seek to solve local problems as well as provide a state that is ideally suited to their conception of human nature. Rather than thinking of the ideal state as a society constructed to apply in any context, I argue that we ought to think of it as a society constructed in response to a particular context that might be useful in different contexts.

An analogy might make this clearer. A Swiss Army knife is designed to be useful anywhere: one of its tools can be used to open a can, or as a screwdriver, or perhaps even to remove a stone from a horse's hoof. This is the standard view of the ideal state. On the other hand, in the 1970s, NASA was researching so-called vortex generators as a way of making aircraft and spacecraft more efficient by reducing the effect of drag from the air. By chance, the NASA engineers realised that this technology could be applied to trucks as well, to make them more fuel-efficient.[1] This is the way I argue we should think of the ideal state. Though it can be applied in other contexts, it was not originally designed for all contexts. I have several times referred to the standard view of ideal state theory as a general solution that might apply locally, and the local problem view of ideal state theory as a particular solution that might apply generally. This analogy might make the difference between these two views of ideal state theory clearer.

The starting point for our investigation was to describe the ideal state in general terms; a model of the ideal state is a description of the best possible political organisation, which is based on some assumptions about the way people actually are, often a theory of human nature (taking men as they are and laws as they can be). Some of the assumptions about human nature we have seen do not look very plausible, like Plato's principle of specialisation; the claim that each individual is naturally suited to one task or profession only. Other theorists have sophisticated theories of human nature, like Hobbes, who devotes the first sixteen chapters of *Leviathan* to working out his theory of human nature and humanity's natural

---

[1] National Aeronautical and Space Administration, "Aerodynamics Research Revolutionizes Truck Design", NASA Spinoff, 2008, accessed May 2022, https://spinoff.nasa.gov/Spinoff2008/t_3.html.

condition, the state of nature. That a model of the ideal state is based on assumptions about human nature is important: the ideal state is the best possible political organisation for *people and nature as they are*; the ideal state idealises organisation. It is therefore the most "realistic" kind of ideal society. The model is held up as an example to emulate, and I have called this the shining beacon view of the ideal state. The shining beacon on the hill offers us a direction in which to move our existing political societies, and a standard by which we can compare non-ideal societies, relative to the beacon.

We examined some temptingly plausible assumptions about models of the ideal state, and found that, as a rule, they do not offer a blueprint, they do not describe a perfect society, and they do not describe a society which lasts forever. As we explored each of our case studies, we saw further confirmation of these conclusions. Not one of the ideal states we have seen could be considered a blueprint. The most common description of a model of the ideal state is a "sketch"; a sketch will give us an idea of what the ideal state looks like, but does not give us the detailed instructions we need in order to build it. Marx and Engels offer an interesting contrast here: their sketch of the ideal society is very sparse indeed, but they *do* give some instructions on how to begin moving closer to the ideal. Similarly, all these ideal states fall short of perfection in some way. In addition to the flaws noted in Chapter 1, Plato's ideal society is predicated on a vast deception, the Noble Lie. Though it might be a justifiable deception, it is hardly *perfect*. None of the societies we investigated can eradicate crime entirely; they all include mechanisms to punish wrongdoers—like enslavement in More's Utopia. It is difficult to say how Marx and Engels's ideal state falls short of perfection, because they give so little idea of what that ideal state looks like. Finally, Plato and Rousseau both concede that their ideal states will not last forever—that they contain within themselves the seeds of their own destruction, as Rousseau puts it. More, or Hythloday at least, does seem to think that the Utopian society will last forever (U: 112). Hobbes and Marx and Engels do not say one way or another. That there should be some variation in these features of the ideal state should not concern us overmuch; the purpose was to show that these are not *necessary* features of the ideal state, though it is tempting to assume that they must be.

Most of the authors we have explored have conceived of their project to describe the ideal state as a scientific or quasi-scientific one; their method is thought to be objective and,

importantly, disinterested.[2] On this view, describing the ideal state requires us to articulate our assumptions about human nature, and then from those assumptions we can derive the state which is ideally suited to that nature. Let us take two examples. Plato, in *Republic*, assumes that people are naturally suited to one task or profession, and that the ideal state is intended to realise justice. His ideal city has a strict class structure and meritocracy in order to preserve justice, which Plato defines as 'doing one's own work and not meddling with what isn't one's own' (IV.433a-b).[3] Hobbes's method in *Leviathan* epitomises this approach to thinking about the ideal state. From a set of axioms, Hobbes lays out a series of demonstrations to build his ideal state; the ideal state is constructed in a series of building blocks, supporting the emerging structure. Where local issues are mentioned at all, they seem to be considered as instances where we have gone wrong because we have not properly understood human nature. Hobbes, for example, mentions the civil war and civil discord more generally as the consequences of dividing the sovereign power, but his ideal state is, he thinks, a general solution to the problem of social organisation. The local application is merely proof that we need to adopt Hobbes's ideal state, or face the consequences.

This way of thinking about the ideal state, while tempting, is incomplete. This approach, what I have called the shining beacon approach to ideal state theory, assumes that a model of the ideal state is objective and disinterested. It is objective in that the structure of the ideal state is derived from assumptions about human nature, and it is disinterested in that it applies as a general solution to the problem of social organisation, rather than as a particular solution in this or that local context. It is a general solution that can apply locally. This conception of the ideal state as a shining beacon is not in itself a bad or wrong way of thinking about the ideal state, but it misses out something important. When we evaluate accounts of the ideal state in this way, we swing back towards the philosophical approach to studying the history of philosophy which we mentioned in the Introduction; the author of the ideal state is treated as a contemporary of ours, and we engage in a discussion with them about the strengths and weaknesses of the model of the ideal state. The local problem conception of ideal state theory follows the historical approach to studying the history of philosophy, where a philosophical text is placed in its appropriate historical context and we ask how it relates to that context.

---

[2] More is the exception; he is using *Utopia* to criticise conditions in the England of his day, and he does so deliberately.

[3] This is *ordinary* justice, as opposed to Platonic justice, which is the arrangement of parts in the individual soul. These two kinds of justice are further distinct from Justice itself, the Form of Justice, which the rulers of the ideal state can perceive and use as a guide in ruling.

Most of the thinkers we have explored in this thesis take themselves to be offering a general or scientific solution, and indeed their accounts of the ideal state can be evaluated as such, but thinking of the ideal state as just a shining beacon misses out something interesting and important. On this view, the shining beacon is a general solution that might apply locally; any actual society might choose to use that beacon as a distant goal to move closer towards. Thinking of the ideal state as also solving local problems gives us a better picture of the hill the beacon is placed on; we can understand a bit more about why the beacon has been placed on that particular hill, which might inform our choices about the beacon we choose to aim for. In this thesis we have examined five such beacons, all with very different ideas of what the good society looks like; understanding what problems the ideal state can solve can be useful to us.

Neglecting the way a model of the ideal state responds to local conditions is very easy to do, however. It falls into the category of tempting mistakes which Daniel C. Dennett says make up a large part of the history of philosophy, as we saw in the Introduction.[4] When we consider Hobbes's approach, it is easy to see the temptation. It is easy to think that a genuine understanding of human nature will allow us to derive the structure of the state which is ideally suited to that nature. However, I have argued that almost in spite of himself, Hobbes's model of the ideal state also prescribes a solution to particular local problems in his own day. Most of the theorists we have explored have a blind spot when it comes to their project, and fail to understand how their ideal state responds to local problems. The lion's share of our investigation in this thesis has been to unpack just how a model of the ideal state can be said to solve a local problem. It may seem obvious to say that works of political philosophy respond to local conditions, but it is often considerably less clear just how a given work responds to its own local conditions, and unpacking it allows us to explore those local conditions, and to find just how the ideal state avoids the problems of its local context. We have found that the local problem is often more complex than it first appears. As we saw with More, for instance—whose local application is generally understood—the brief summary given by some scholars that More's ideal state reacts and responds to the Tudor enclosure movement makes the same error More himself made, and attacks the result rather than the cause. Understanding the way in which ideal states solve local problems gives us a more nuanced understanding of the ideal state, and what a model of the ideal state aims to achieve.

---

[4] Dennett, *Intuition Pumps*, 19.

Let us briefly remind ourselves of the local problems which each model of the ideal state we have examined in this thesis sought to solve, and the solutions which were proposed to them. For this section we proceed in chronological order. Plato found the democratic government of Athens irrational, and sought to place political power in the hands of those who are suited by nature to wield it, on the basis that politics is, for Plato, a science (*technē* is the word Plato uses, meaning art or skill) which can only be properly entrusted to those who have knowledge of Justice itself, as well as the other Forms. He was also concerned by the instability of the Athenian state and the pressure of public opinion; in Kallipolis unity is ensured through the unity of opposites, and public opinion plays no role in the running of the state. In this way Plato aims to make the whole populace as happy as possible by ensuring everybody inhabits the role to which they are best suited by nature.

Thomas More was concerned by the developing rich-poor divide in the England of his day, as exemplified by the enclosure movement, where communal land was converted into privately-owned land, usually for pasture. This forced tenants off the land and into poverty, and they often resorted to theft to survive. On More's account, the root cause of enclosure is human greed, so his ideal society makes greed impossible, and posits a community in which every member contributes to the common good. Utopia has no money, and everybody works to the same common purpose. There is no private property, so nothing for personal, selfish gain, and because everyone has the same things—houses and clothing for instance are all identical—there is nothing to compare against other people, so no basis for envy and the dissent it causes.

Thomas Hobbes observed the power struggles in England between King Charles I and his parliaments before the Civil Wars. His great insight was that a divided kingdom must, sooner or later, fall. The sovereign power in England in the 1630s and 40s was divided, or thought to be divided, between the king and parliament. Hobbes argues that the sovereign power is necessarily indivisible, and also settles the question of who has that authority: it lies with the Sovereign, who in the antebellum English context is Charles I. After the civil wars, and the establishment of the Commonwealth, the power of sovereignty would seem to pass to

parliament. It is for this reason that some have argued that Hobbes has a *de facto* theory of obligation, that the possession of power is what gives rise to authority and obligation.[5]

Jean-Jacques Rousseau makes a contribution to an ongoing conversation in eighteenth-century Geneva about the nature of the state. There were two broad narratives: one which held that the General Council was fundamentally and inescapably sovereign, and another which held that the General Council had delegated sovereignty to the smaller councils, and this delegated authority could not be unilaterally withdrawn. In his exploration of the social contract, Rousseau posits an ideal state which supports the former narrative. The general will is at the centre of this ideal state, as the guiding principle of legitimate political decision-making. If we are to follow its guidance, we cannot delegate political authority permanently. The people are sovereign, and sovereignty cannot be represented. The authority which is delegated by the Sovereign, the assembly of all the Citizens, can be revoked at any time.

Finally, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels looked at the social question, the question of poverty and inequality, through the lens of industrial capitalism as it was then practised in England. Their diagnosis of the problem is that the proletariat are alienated from their very humanity, that the most important element of human nature is made a mere means to an end, to enable survival. They envisage a major upheaval in social relations, imposing a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, after which the communist ideal state can be established as a stateless society in which the free development of each is the condition for the development of all, as Marx puts it. In the communist ideal state, labour will no longer be alienated, and the social problems of mid-nineteenth century England that Engels described so vividly will evaporate.

There is an interesting common thread through a number of these models of the ideal state. Property is a question which three of the theorists we have looked at consider directly, and at least one of the other theorists considers property indirectly. Plato, More, and Marx and

---

[5] Hoekstra, "The De Facto Turn in Hobbes's Political Philosophy," 34. It is worth noting that Hoekstra argues that labelling Hobbes a *de facto* theorist is insufficiently precise, indeed even misleading. At different points, he seems to endorse royalism, *de facto* obligation, *de facto* authority, and consent theory. This is consistent with Hobbes's underlying political theory, though, which needed to be able to turn with the times. Ibid., 71, 73. These theories are all seeking to answer the question of where authority arises, and why we ought to obey authority. Rousseau, in the *Social Contract*, argues that force does not give rise to moral obligation: we are *forced* to obey a stronger power, but we are not morally *obligated* to obey it. We are only obliged to obey legitimate authority, on Rousseau's account.

Engels—treating Marx and Engels as one unit here—all advocate for the abolition of private property, though for Plato it is only the guardian class for whom private property is abolished. It is interesting that these three ideal states, all responding to very different contexts, should advocate for the abolition of private property. The most likely explanation is that Plato, More, and Marx and Engels were all attempting to resolve social problems as well as purely political ones, and abolishing private property had positive social outcomes in their ideal state. Hobbes does not talk about property directly. His ideal state is much more constitutionally focused, and hence less directed towards social issues. However, his attitude towards private property is reasonably easy to derive. For Hobbes, security is of the utmost importance, and it seems plausible that security in our goods would be important too. This is not a radical difference to the status quo of Hobbes's time; the idea that we should be secure in our property is not a radical one, which is probably why Hobbes does not address it.

One of the tasks of the historian of philosophy is to try to clarify the past, to improve our understanding of it. Thinking of models of the ideal state as a particular solution to local problems rather than simply scientifically derived models of the ideal gives us a clearer and more complete picture of the history of political philosophy. It is valuable to explore what motivated a given thinker's work, and the relationship between their work and the historical context in which they lived. The way of thinking about the ideal state which I have proposed in this thesis gives us another tool with which to explore and understand the philosophers of the past. The accounts we have investigated give us a good cross-section of philosophy's long history, which suggests that if the thinkers we have investigated have all had the same blind spot—with the exception of More, who was deliberately using Utopia to comment on local conditions—then it is possible, perhaps even likely, that others who have offered a model of the ideal state share it as well. It seems plausible, then, that the theorists we have investigated should not be alone in thinking of the ideal state as a scientific solution to the problem of social organisation. However, this is at best a hypothesis to be tested.

6.1 On the Value of Utopian Thinking

I have argued that several ideal state theorists have not recognised the local application of their ideal state; the local application of the ideal state is a blind spot in their thinking, and that I suspect most ideal state theorists have the same blind spot. That is a purely historical thesis; it gives us a richer and more meaningful understanding of the past. However, there is

188

more than purely historical value to be found in it. Recognising that ideal state theorists have not recognised the local application of their ideal state is illuminating; it allows us to recognise something else which we could not do if we took them at their word. To evaluate this illumination, I want to return to Chapter 1 and our discussion of utopia. There, we distinguished between two senses of utopia: a pejorative sense, or mere utopia, which is an exercise in limitless imagination, a description of a society which ignores factual constraints; and a more technical sense, or proper utopia, which is the kind of ideal society we have been interested in. We set the mere utopia aside, to focus on the proper utopia. At this point, we can return to the pejorative sense, to show that it is misguided to apply it to ideal state theory.

Utopian thinking is not as intrinsically impractical as the pejorative sense of the term suggests. As we saw in Chapter 1, this sense of utopia is not absent from scholarly discussions: Thomas Nagel describes utopian ideals as those which real people cannot be motivated to live by, and Laura Valentini describes utopian theories of justice as uninterested in factual constraints.[6] If we take ideal state theorists at their word, and believe that they are just working out a description of the best possible society based on some assumptions about human nature, then it is easy to see why we might conclude that the societies they describe are utopian in this sense of intrinsically impractical. The ideal state which Rousseau describes in his *Social Contract*, for example, is very strange when taken at face value; as he acknowledges, it can only work in a state which is very small.[7] All the ideal states we have considered seem to be impractical and, as Valentini puts it, seem to be uninterested in factual constraints. However, taking ideal state theorists at their word will lead us astray, because they—and we—have a blind spot in their thinking. Once we recognise that, despite their intentions, the ideal state is a local solution that might apply generally, then we can see that there is a practical element to the ideal state. As we saw, key elements in Plato's ideal state can be compared with events in Athens, and the ideal state solves problems with the Athenian state. This seems to be reasonably well-understood in the field of utopianism; I have referred more than once to Gregory Claeys's definition of utopianism as 'a process of imagining much better . . . societies, *which serve as models to judge the inadequacies of the present*'.[8]

---

[6] Nagel, "What Makes a Political Theory Utopian?," 904; Valentini, "Ideal Vs. Non-Ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map," 657.

[7] Rousseau was writing in the mid-eighteenth century, as the modern nation-states were taking form. To convert from our modern states with populations numbering in the millions, to (ideal) small societies of a few thousand exhibits the kind of impractical thinking which many would consider (merely) utopian. The difficulty becomes more acute when we wonder how the resources are to be provided for each independent community.

[8] Claeys, *Marx and Marxism*, 231. My emphasis.

Understanding the ideal state as offering practical solutions to local problems gives us reason to think that they are not intrinsically impractical, and hence not (merely) utopian.

In ideal state theory, as we have seen, there is more than mere criticism: the ideal states we have examined do more than show what is wrong with current societies; they also offer ways to remedy those ills. The remedies which ideal states offer are not blueprints, to be imposed exactly as written, but they offer the beginnings of a solution to local problems. I think this is likely to be a general feature of utopian thinking; an image of the ideal society does not provide a blueprint, but provides an imaginative solution to a local problem. This feature is on display in the less realistic versions of the ideal society, such as the medieval Cockaygne; in that society geese are already cooked, and there are rivers of wine. The local problem is that good food is hard to come by, and Cockaygne offers an imaginative solution to this problem—though, hardly a realistic one. More's *Utopia* might offer a more realistic solution to the same problem, where food is freely available according to need. The way we have analysed ideal state theory provides yet more evidence that the pejorative sense of utopia as pie-in-the-sky daydreaming is misguided.

I have argued that utopian thinking—and ideal state theory is a species of utopian thinking—is not intrinsically impractical. A model of the ideal state offers imaginative solutions to problems in its local context, and these solutions can apply generally. There is therefore a comparative element to ideal state theory which is worth discussing. To a certain extent, political philosophy has always been comparative: one of Aristotle's projects, now mostly lost, was to compile a catalogue of Greek constitutions; Hobbes catalogues and compares different kinds of constitution based on whether they are monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy. However, this is not the only kind of comparative political philosophy. When we do comparative thinking, we assume that there is some specific problem that examining multiple examples of can be illuminating. It is not merely what Andrew March calls 'a zoological cataloguing of diversity'.[9]

In this thesis, we have compared the different ways philosophers have reacted and responded to their local circumstances. However, there is a further kind of comparison we can make: how philosophers have tried to solve different instances of the same or similar problems. In

---

[9] Andrew F. March, "What is Comparative Political Theory?," *The Review of Politics* 71, no. 4 (Fall 2009), 537.

the models we have investigated, the local problems have often been particular formulations of a perennial political problems: for example, Hobbes's ideal state solves the problem of disagreement among the ruling class and the division of sovereignty; Plato solves the problem of how we determine who should rule and how much influence the non-ruling classes should have, and so on. These perennial problems are not isolated to their time; they cause problems in modern politics as well. Recognising models of the ideal state as providing solutions to local problems means that we can compare solutions, and so inform modern policy discussions.

We should note that using the solutions provided by particular models of the ideal states to inform discussions in our own day does not mean we should advocate for adopting the proposed model in its entirety. If, for example, we want to use one of the solutions Plato offers in *Republic* to solve a problem in our own day, it does not then follow that we need to solve that problem by instituting the ideal city, with its rigid class structure, commitment to the Noble Lie, and so on. We are able to pick and choose. This is because we recognise how Plato's ideal state responds to its local context, but Plato himself did not recognise this. With the exception of More, who was deliberately using *Utopia* to comment on local problems, each of the ideal state theorists we have investigated takes themselves to be engaged in a general project, providing a solution to the problem of social organisation, based on a proper understanding of human nature. However, we by now recognise that their solutions are directed towards specific local problems, and we are able to use the way they solved the problem in question to inform how we might go about solving the same kind of problem in our own day.

As well as this, we should keep in mind that a model of the ideal state is not generally intended as a blueprint. It is not a package of reforms to be adopted in its entirety; a model of the ideal state is used to hold up a mirror to contemporary society and show how much better things could be. These are two different kinds of project, an ideal state and a reform package. Many of the theorists we have considered in this thesis have undertaken both kinds of project. Plato's *Republic* presents a model of the ideal state; *Laws* is much more practically focused on reform. Rousseau used the *Social Contract* to exhibit an ideal state, but also provided constitutional advice for Corsica and Poland. Similarly, John Locke gave a model of the ideal state in his *Second Treatise on Government*, and drafted the constitution for the colony of

Carolina.[10] When we use models of the ideal state as tools to inform practical policy discussions, we do not have to adopt the ideal state in its entirety.

Let us explore an example of how a model of the ideal state, understood as offering a particular solution to local problems, can be used as a tool to inform policy discussions in our own day. In the Introduction I mentioned how Plato's *Republic* can be used in connection with the influence of corporations on politics in our own day, most commonly—or notoriously—in the United States. One of the problems Plato solves in his ideal state is the tension between a personal interest and the public interest. This tension was on display in the debate between Nicias and Alcibiades, in the emotional pressure of public opinion which attempted to influence the Assembly, and most prominently in the reign of terror of the Thirty Tyrants. Plato's solution is to separate the public and private interests by denying the guardians private property, and ensuring that they have no personal interest separate from that of the city. We will discuss how Plato's solution might be used to resolve a similar tension between public and private interests in the United States in our own day.

The kind of tension between public and private interests which Plato noticed is also noticeable in the United States. Members of Congress are influenced to vote a certain way based on financial contributions from lobby groups, rather than voting in the interest of their constituents. Between 1991 and 2006 and causal relationship between corporate campaign contributions and voting in the US House of Representatives has been observed.[11] Indeed, in 2012 private interests spent about US$12.5 million per member of Congress on lobbying activities; in the UK lobbying is estimated to be a £2 billion industry.[12] The range and effectiveness of corporate influence in US politics does rather remind us of Marx's comment that 'the executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' (*MECW* 6: 486). Lobbying can be extremely effective, as Daniel Nyberg quotes a former member of Congress: 'You get invited to a dinner somewhere and someone gives you some money. And then you get a call a month later and he wants to see you. Are you going to say no? You're not going to say no. So it does buy you access'.[13] The

---

[10] John Locke, *Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1993), 18.
[11] Daniel Nyberg, "Corporations, Politics, and Democracy: Corporate Political Activities as Political Corruption," *Organization Theory* 2 (2021): 9.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

kind of tension between private and public interest which Plato observed in the Athens of his day is on display in the United States as well.

We can use Plato's solution as a tool to inform the discussion about how to resolve this problem. Plato's solution is to completely divorce political and economic power, in order to preserve the principle of unity. There must be no conflict between the rulers' own interests and the interests of the city, so Plato constructs the state such that the rulers have no interests of their own, and instead identify their own interests with the city's. The Noble Lie serves to strengthen this, by turning the city (or, at least, the guardians) into one huge family. In this way Plato resolves the problem he observed in the Athens of his day. However, as we noted, we do not need to adopt Plato's solution in its entirety. Its use to us is as inspiration, not as a blueprint. We can only think to draw on his ideal state for inspiration, though, if we recognise that it is not a general solution to the problem of social organisation, but a particular solution to specific problems. The inspiration we might take from Plato's model of the ideal state is that we ought to ensure our elected representatives are not able to identify their personal interest with the public interest, and we might do this by separating economic and political power in some way, as Plato does. One possibility might be a Bill proposed by Senator Elizabeth Warren, to prohibit members of the US government from owing stocks.[14] The key point is that we can draw on Plato's ideal state for inspiration to help us solve political problems in our own day, and that we can only do this once we recognise Plato's ideal state as a particular solution to local problems.

6.2 The Philosophical View of the Ideal State: Limitations of the Historical View

In this thesis I have argued that we ought to consider models of the ideal state not simply as models of society intended to accommodate a particular conception of human nature, but that we ought to consider them also as particular solutions to local problems in an author's historical context. I have argued further that this way of thinking about the ideal state can be of use to us, and I have explored some of the ways it is useful. There is a question about whether this local problem view is in preference or in addition to the standard view of the

---

[14] Elizabeth Warren. "A Bill to Improve the Anti-Corruption and Public Integrity Laws, and for Other Purposes," 2021, accessed June 2021, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Anti-Corruption%20and%20Public%20Integrity%20Act%20of%202020.pdf., as reported in Maggie Severns. "Warren Re-Ups Bill to Ban Stock Trading by Lawmakers," 18/12/2020, accessed June 2021, https://www.politico.com/news/2020/12/18/elizabeth-warren-stock-trading-ban-448390.

ideal state. I have argued that we should prefer it *if* we are seeking to understand how the ideal state is put together and some of the influences on its structure. However, most of the time when we read these classic works like the ones we have discussed in this thesis, that is not what we are doing.

My thesis is therefore applicable to a relatively narrow range of activity. It is most obviously applicable to historians of philosophy, but it does apply outside that context. In part, I think that understanding the decision-making behind these models of the ideal state is just intrinsically interesting, and therefore valuable for its own sake. Understanding the way an ideal state reacts and responds to the world in which it was written is interesting and gives us a richer understanding of our shared intellectual heritage. It has an instrumental value as well, as indicated in the previous section.

On the other hand, it is clear that my thesis does not apply in all cases. Many of the texts we have looked at are timeless—or near-timeless—great works of Western philosophy. There is value in reading them as timeless works, independent of their historical context, and not reducing them to parochial or locally focused works. I mentioned this in Chapter 1,[15] when I noted that thinking of the ideal state as a reaction and response to local problems is not the only way to think of it. When we engage with works of philosophy independent of their historical context, we take a different approach to the text to the one I have used in this thesis. There is a question, then, of which approach we ought to prefer, and why.

To answer that question in depth would require more space than we have available here, but in a nutshell the way we ought to read a text depends on what we want to get out of it. In the Introduction we discussed two approaches to studying the history of philosophy: the philosophical approach and the historical approach. These approaches are the extreme ends of a continuum, and we can occupy a position somewhere along that continuum according to how we think it best to approach the history of philosophy. The philosophical approach treats the text as a text: we act as though the author is a contemporary of ours and engage in conversation or debate with them. The historical approach treats the text as an artefact tied to a particular time and place: to understand it requires understanding the time and place to

---

[15] At the end of section 1.6.

which it belongs. These are, as I noted, the extremes and there is a range of possible positions between them. Which approach we should prefer depends on what we are looking to achieve.

When we take the philosophical approach to a text, we are interested in how the text answers some question, and we think we might be able to learn something interesting from the way the author has chosen to answer it. For example, when we read *Republic*, taking the philosophical approach, we are interested in Plato's answer to the question of how the state ought to be structured, and think we can learn something from his response. It is important to note that we do not have to learn something *positive* from Plato in this case—modern reactions to his ideal state are frequently negative—but we are still learning from his answer to the question. This is the most common approach; as we have seen, reactions from an author's contemporaries tended to take the philosophical approach rather than the historical approach.

Taking the historical approach—or at least, taking the kind of historical approach I have taken in this thesis—is less interested in what the answer to the question of social organisation actually is, and more interested in how an author developed that answer. It asks what was going on in the author's time and place that influenced them and shaped the way they constructed the ideal state. If the philosophical approach gives us a shining beacon on the hill, that we can use to decide in which direction we want to go, the historical approach gives us some indication of why the beacon is on that particular hill and, perhaps, not another.

6.3 Utopia Here and Now

In this thesis, I have argued that ideal state theorists have not recognised that their models of the ideal state offer particular solutions to local problems, rather than only offering a general solution to the problem of social organisation, based on assumptions about human nature. This blind spot has led them to assume that their project is somehow scientific, and that the ideal state represents a shining beacon on the hill, offering an orientation and evaluative standard for political change. By carefully comparing several models of the ideal state with their local context, we have found that they offer more or less detailed solutions to some problem to be found in their local context. These problems, in a nutshell, were (in chronological order) the amateur and unstable nature of Athenian politics, the deepening

inequality caused by private property, power struggles between the king and parliament in seventeenth-century England, the constitutional discussions in eighteenth-century Geneva, and the dehumanising grindstone of Victorian-era industrial capitalism. Recognising that models of the ideal state have this local focus allows us to use the imaginative solutions offered to these and other problems as inspiration when we are faced with the same or similar problems in our own day. In this way, utopia is not to be found in the distant future or in a far-off island, but is rather to be found—or created—in the here and now.

Bibliography

Adam, Adela Marion, ed. *The Apology of Socrates*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Annas, Julia. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Apperley, Alan. "Hobbes on Democracy." *Politics* 19, no. 3 (1999): 165-71.

Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution.* London: Penguin, 2006.

Aristophanes. *Birds, Lysistrata, Assembly-Women, Wealth.* Translated by Stephen Halliwell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Aristotle. "Constitution of Athens." Translated by F.G. Kenyon. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, edited by Jonathan Barnes. Vol. Two, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.

———. "Nicomachean Ethics." Translated by W.D. Ross and J.O. Urmson. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, edited by Jonathan Barnes. Vol. 2, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.

———. "On the Soul." Translated by J.A. Smith. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, edited by Jonathan Barnes. Vol. 1, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.

———. "Politics." Translated by B. Jowett. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, edited by Jonathan Barnes. Vol. 2, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.

———. *Posterior Analytics.* Translated by Jonathan Barnes. Second ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.

———. "Rhetoric." Translated by W. Rhys Roberts. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, edited by Jonathan Barnes. Vol. 2, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale.* London: Vintage, 1996.

Augustine. *On Free Choice of the Will.* Translated by Thomas Williams. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993.

Austin, John. *The Province of Jurisprudence Determined.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Bailer-Jones, Daniela M. *Scientific Models in Philosophy of Science.* Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009.

Baker-Smith, Dominic. "Reading *Utopia*." In *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More*, edited by George M. Logan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Barnes, Jonathan. "Justice Writ Large." In *Virtue and Happiness: Essays in Honour of Julia Annas*, edited by Rachana Kamtekar. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Barron, Caroline M. . "The Making of a London Citizen." In *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More*, edited by George M. Logan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Baumgold, Deborah. *Three-Text Edition of Thomas Hobbes's Political Theory.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Beecher, Jonathan. "Early European Socialism." In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, edited by George Klosko. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Beecher, Jonathan, and Richard Bienvenu, eds. *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier: Selected Texts on Work, Love, and Passionate Attraction*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971.

Bennett, Martyn. *The Civil Wars in Britain and Ireland, 1638-1651.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.

Berger, Helge, and Mark Spoerer. "Economic Crises and the European Revolutions of 1848." *The Journal of Economic History* 61, no. 2 (2001): 293-326.

Berlin, Isaiah. *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas.* Second ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Bertram, Christopher. "Rousseau's Legacy in Two Conceptions of the General Will: Democratic and Transcendent." *The Review of Politics* 74, no. 3 (2012): 403-19.

———. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Rousseau and the Social Contract.* London and New York: Routledge, 2004.

Bevir, Mark. "The Contextualist Approach." In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, edited by George Klosko. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Black, Jeremy, and Donald M. MacRaild. *Nineteenth-Century Britain.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Blackburn, Robert. "Magna Carta and the Development of the British Constitution." *The Historian*, no. 125 (2015): 26-29.

Bloom, Allan. *The Republic of Plato.* Second ed. New York: Basic Books, 1991.

Bluck, R.S. "Plato's 'Ideal' State." *The Classical Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (1959): 166-68.

Boucher, Geoff. *Understanding Marxism.* Durham: Acumen, 2012.

Boyer, George R. "The Historical Background of the Communist Manifesto." *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 12, no. 4 (1998): 151-74.

Brandon, Eric. *The Coherence of Hobbes's Leviathan: Civil and Religious Authority Combined.* London: Continuum, 2007.

Brickhouse, Thomas C., and Nicholas D. Smith. *Socrates on Trial.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Brisson, Luc. "Plato's View on Greek Government." In *A Companion to Ancient Greek Government*, edited by Hans Beck. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

Burgess, Glenn. "Contexts for the Writing and Publication of Hobbes's *Leviathan*." *History of Political Thought* 11, no. 4 (1990): 675-702.

Burnyeat, M.F. "Utopia and Fantasy: The Practicability of Plato's Ideally Just City." In *Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul*, edited by Gail Fine. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Byron, Chris. "Essence and Alienation: Marx's Theory of Human Nature." *Science and Society* 80, no. 3 (2016): 375-94.

Calvert, Brian. "Slavery in Plato's *Republic*." *The Classical Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (1987): 367-72.

Cammack, Daniela. "Plato and Athenian Justice." *History of Political Thought* 36, no. 4 (2015): 611-42.

Campbell, John L., and John A. Hall. *The World of States.* London: Bloomsbury, 2015.

Carawan, Edwin. *The Athenian Amnesty and Reconstructing the Law.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Carens, Joseph H. *Equality, Moral Incentives, and the Market.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Carey, Christopher. *Democracy in Classical Athens.* Second ed. London: Bloomsbury, 2017.

Carlin, Norah. *The Causes of the English Civil War.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1999.

Carver, Terrell. "The *Manifesto* in Marx's and Engels's Lifetimes." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Communist Manifesto*, edited by Terrell Carver and James Farr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

———. "The Marxian Tradition." In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, edited by George Klosko. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

———. "Reading Marx: Life and Works." In *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, edited by Terrell Carver. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Case, Holly. "The "Social Question", 1820-1920." *Modern Intellectual History* 13, no. 3 (2016): 747-75.

Chambers, R.W. *Thomas More.* London: Penguin, 1935.

Charchuła, Jarosław. "Hobbes's Theory of State. The Structure and Function of State as the Key to Its Enduring." *Forum Philosophicum* 15 (2010): 191-203.

Chea, Pheng. *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

Chernow, Ron. *Washington: A Life.* London: Penguin, 2010.

Churchill, Winston S. *The Second World War, Volume I: The Gathering Storm.* London: Cassell, 1948.

Chwaszcza, Christine. "The Seat of Sovereignty: Hobbes on the Artificial Person of the Commonwealth or State." *Hobbes Studies* 25 (2012): 123-42.

Claeys, Gregory. *Marx and Marxism.* London: Pelican, 2018.

———. "News from Somewhere: Enhanced Sociability and the Composite Definition of Utopia and Dystopia." *History* 98, no. 2 (2013): 145-73.

———. "Socialism and Utopia." In *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*, edited by Roland Schaer, Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with The New York Public Library, 2000.

———. "*Utopia* at Five Hundred: Some Reflections." *Utopian Studies* 27, no. 3, SPECIAL ISSUE: On the Commemoration of the Five Hundredth Anniversary of Thomas More's *Utopia* Part II (2016): 402-411.

Clarkson, Leslie, and Margaret Crawford. *Feast and Famine: Food and Nutrition in Ireland 1500-1920.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Cohen, Joshua. *Rousseau: A Free Community of Equals.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Collins, Jeffrey R. *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Conroy, Peter V., Jr. "Rousseau's Organic State." *South Atlantic Bulletin* 44, no. 2 (1979): 1-13.

Copp, David. "Hobbes on Artificial Persons and Collective Actions." *The Philosophical Review* 89, no. 4 (1980): 579-606.

Cowling, Mark, ed. *The Communist Manifesto: New Interpretations*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.

Cudworth, Erika, Tim Hall, and John McGovern. *The Modern State : Theories and Ideologies.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

Curtis, Cathy. "More's Public Life." In *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More*, edited by George M. Logan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

D'Angour, Armand. *Socrates in Love: The Making of a Philosopher.* London: Bloomsbury, 2019.

Dare, Tim, and Justine Kingsbury. "Putting the Burden of Proof in Its Place: When Are Differential Allocations Legitimate?". *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 46 (2008): 503-18.

Davis, J.C. *Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing, 1516-1700.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Davis, Laurence. "Isaiah Berlin, William Morris, and the Politics of Utopia." *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 3, no. 2-3 (2000): 56-86.

Demos, Raphael. "Paradoxes in Plato's Doctrine of the Ideal State." *The Classical Quarterly* 7, no. 3/4 (1957): 164-74.

Dennett, Daniel C. *Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Thinking.* New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2013.

Dent, Nicholas. *Rousseau.* London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

Diogenes Laertius. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers.* Translated by R.D. Hicks. 2 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972.

Draper, Hal. "Joseph Weydemeyer's "Dictatorship of the Proletariat"." *Labor History* 3, no. 2 (1962): 208-13.

———. *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution.* Vol. I: State and Bureucracy, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977.

———. *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution.* Vol. 2: The Politics of Social Classes, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977.

———. *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution.* Vol. 3: The 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat', New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977.

Duncan, Mike. *7.13 the Spectre of the French Revolution.* Podcast audio. Revolutions. Accessed May 2021. https://thehistoryofrome.typepad.com/revolutions_podcast/2017/10/the-spectre-of-the-french-revolution.html.

———. *The Storm before the Storm: The Beginning of the End of the Roman Republic.* New York: PublicAffairs, 2017.

Dyer, Christopher. *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The People of Britain, 850-1520.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002.

Emmet, Dorothy. *The Role of the Unrealisable: A Study in Regulative Ideals.* London: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

Engels, Frederick. *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science.* London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1969.

Erman, Eva, and Niklas Möller. "Three Failed Charges against Ideal Theory." *Social Theory and Practice* 39, no. 1 (2013): 19-44.

Ewin, R. E. *Virtues and Rights: The Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes.* Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991.

Faguet, Emile. *Pour Qu'on Lise Platon.* Paris: Boivin, 1905.

Fassin, Didier, Yasmine Bouagga, Isabelle Coutant, Jean-Sébastien Eideliman, Fabrice Fernandez, Nicolas Fischer, Carolina Kobelinsky*, et al. At the Heart of the State: The Moral World of Institutions.* Translated by Patrick Brown and Didier Fassin. London: Pluto Press, 2015.

Fernando, Julian W., Nicholas Burden, Adam Ferguson, Léan V. O'Brien, Madeline Judge, and Yoshihisa Kashima. "Functions of Utopia: How Utopian Thinking Motivates Societal Engagement." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 44, no. 5 (2018): 779-92.

Ferrari, G. R. F. *City and Soul in Plato's Republic.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Fleming, Sean. "The Two Faces of Personhood: Hobbes, Corporate Agency and the Personality of the State." *European Journal of Political Theory* **20**, no. 1 (2021): 5-26.

Fokkema, Douwe. *Perfect Worlds: Utopian Fiction in China and the West.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011.

Fox, Alistair. *Politics and Literature in the Reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.

———. *Utopia: An Elusive Vision.* New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993.

Frigg, Roman, and Stephan Hartmann. "Models in Science." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2018.

Garsten, Bryan. "Benjamin Constant's Liberalism and the Political Theology of the General Will." In *The General Will: The Evolution of a Concept*, edited by James Farr and David Lay Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Gaus, Gerald. *The Tyranny of the Ideal: Justice in a Diverse Society.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Gauthier, David P. *The Logic of Leviathan: The Moral and Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Geoghegan, Vincent. *Utopianism and Marxism.* London and New York: Methuen, 1987.

Geras, Norman. *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend.* London: NLB, 1983.

Goedecke, Walter Robert. "Aristotle's Search for the Perfect State: The Methodology of the Politics." *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 1, no. 1/2 (1970): 58-64.

Goldstein, Robert Justin. "Comparing the European Revolutions of 1848 and 1989." *Society* 44 (2007): 155-59.

Goodey, Brian R. "Mapping "Utopia": A Comment on the Geography of Sir Thomas More." *Geographical Review* 60, no. 1 (1970): 15-30.

Goodwin, Barbara, ed. *The Philosophy of Utopia*. London and Portland: Frank Cass, 2001.

Grayling, A.C. *The History of Philosophy.* London: Penguin, 2019.

Grube, G.M.A. "The Marriage Laws in Plato's *Republic*." *The Classical Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1927): 95-99.

Guthrie, W.K.C. *A History of Ancient Greek Philosophy Volume Four: Plato the Man and His Dialogues, Earlier Period.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Guy, John. *Thomas More.* London: Arnold, 2000.

Hall, Robert William. "The Just and Happy Man of the *Republic*: Fact or Fallacy?". *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9, no. 2 (1971): 147-58.

Halpin, David. "Utopian Totalism Versus Utopian Realism: A Reply to Darren Webb." *Oxford Review of Education* 35, no. 6 (2009): 761-64.

Hamilton, James J. "Hobbes the Royalist, Hobbes the Republican." *History of Political Thought* 30, no. 3 (2009): 411-54.

———. "The Origins of Hobbes's State of Nature." *Hobbes Studies* 26 (2013): 152-70.

Hampton, Jean. *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Harris, Tim. "Revisiting the Causes of the English Civil War." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (2015): 615-35.

Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum. "Rear Platform and Other Informal Remarks in New York (October 10, 1952)." accessed November 2020, https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/289/rear-platform-and-other-informal-remarks-new-york.

Hay, Colin, Michael Lister, and David Marsh, eds. *The State: Theories and Issues*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Heraclitus. *Fragments: A Text and Translation, with a Commentary by T.M. Robinson.* Edited and Translated by T.M. Robinson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.

Herbert, Simon. "Identifying Utopia." *Thomas Project: a border journal for utopian thoughts*, no. 2 (2019): 97-112.

Hesk, Jon. *Deception and Democracy in Classical Athens.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Hexter, J.H. *More's Utopia: The Biography of an Idea.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952.

Hill, Christopher. *The Century of Revolution, 1603-1714.* Second ed. Wokingham: Van Nostrand Reinhold (UK), 1980.

Hinde, Andrew. *England's Population: A History since the Domesday Survey.* London: Arnold, 2003.

Hobbes, Thomas. "Behemoth: The History of the Causes of the Civil Wars of England." In *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, edited by Sir William Molesworth. Vol. VI, London: John Bohn, 1840.

———. "Considerations Upon the Reputation, Loyalty, Manners, and Religion of Thomas Hobbes." In *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, edited by Sir William Molesworth. Vol. IV, London: John Bohn, 1840.

———. "De Corpore Politico, or the Elements of Law." In *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, edited by Sir William Molesworth. Vol. 4, London: John Bohn, 1840.

———. *Leviathan, with Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668.* Edited by Edwin Curley. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994.

———. "Six Lessons to the Savilian Professors of the Mathematics." In *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, edited by Sir William Molesworth. Vol. VII, London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1845.

Hobsbawm, Eric. *How to Change the World: Marx and Marxism 1840-2011.* London: Little, Brown, 2011.

Hoekstra, Kinch. "The De Facto Turn in Hobbes's Political Philosophy." In *Leviathan after 350 Years*, edited by Tom Sorrell and Luc Foisneau. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Homer. *The Odyssey of Homer.* Translated by Richmond Lattimore. New York: HarperPerennial, 1967.

Hörnqvist, Mikael. "Renaissance Political Philosophy." In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, edited by George Klosko. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Hoye, J. Matthew. "Obligation and Sovereign Virtue in Hobbes's *Leviathan*." *The Review of Politics* 79 (2017): 23-47.

Hugo, Victor. *Les Misérables.* London: Penguin, 1982.

Hunt, Tristram. *The Frock-Coated Communist: The Revolutionary Life of Friedrich Engels.* London: Allen Lane, 2009.

IPU Parline. "Compare Data on Parliaments." accessed September 2020, https://data.ipu.org/compare?field=chamber%3A%3Afield_current_members_number&structure=any__lower_chamber#map.

Jeon, Haewon. "The Interaction between the Just City and Its Citizens in Plato's Republic: From the Producers' Point of View." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52, no. 2 (2014): 183-203.

Johnstone, Monty. "The Paris Commune and Marx's Conception of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat." *The Massachusetts Review* 12, no. 3 (1971): 447-62.

Jouvenal, Bertrand de. "Utopias for Practical Purposes." In *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, edited by Frank E. Manuel. Boston: Beacon Press, 1967.

Kagan, Donald. *The Peloponnesian War.* London: Viking, 2003.

Kasimis, Demetra. "Plato's Open Secret." *Contemporary Political Theory* 15, no. 4 (2016): 339-57.

Kateb, George. "Utopia and the Good Life." In *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, edited by Frank E. Manuel. Boston: Beacon Press, 1967.

Kavka, Gregory S. "Why Even Morally Perfect People Would Need Government." *Social Philosophy and Policy* 12, no. 1 (1995): 1-18.

Kelly, Christopher. "Sovereign Versus Government: Rousseau's Republicanism." *Acta Politilogica* 10, no. 2 (2018): 15-32.

Kenny, Anthony. *A New History of Western Philosophy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Kenyon, J.P., ed. *The Stuart Constitution 1603-1688: Documents and Commentary.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Keyt, David. "Plato and the Ship of State." In *Nature and Justice: Studies in the Ethical and Political Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, edited by David Keyt. Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2017.

———. "Plato on Justice." In *A Companion to Plato*, edited by Hugh H. Benson. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006.

Kiesselbach, Matthias. "Hobbes's Struggle with Contractual Obligation. On the Status of the Laws of Nature in Hobbes's Work." *Hobbes Studies* 23 (2010): 105-23.

Kincaid, Paul. "*Utopia* in Context." *Foundation* 45, no. 124 (2016): 5-18.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. "I Have a Dream." 1963, accessed May 2019, https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech/pdf.

Kirk, Linda. "Genevan Republicanism." In *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society 1649-1776*, edited by David Wootton. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994.

Klosko, George. *The Development of Plato's Political Theory.* Second ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

———. "Implementing the Ideal State." *The Journal of Politics* 43, no. 2 (1981): 365-89.

———. *Jacobins and Utopians: The Political Theory of Fundamental Moral Reform.* Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003.

Kögler, Hans-Herbert. "Utopianism." In *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, edited by Ted Honderich. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Krentz, Peter. *The Thirty at Athens.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982.

Kucharski, Janek. ""I Was Following Orders": An Ancient Greek Archetype of Modern War Crime Legislation." *The European Legacy* 23, no. 1-2 (2018): 60-76.

Kumar, Krishan. "Aspects of the Western Utopian Tradition." *History of the Human Sciences* 16, no. 1 (2003): 63-77.

———. *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987.

Larrère, Catherine. "Jean-Jacques Rousseau on Woman and Citizenship." *History of European Ideas* 37, no. 2 (2011): 218-22.

Lenin, V.I. *Selected Works.* 3 vols. Vol. 2, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977.

Leopold, David. "Marx, Engels and Other Socialisms." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Communist Manifesto*, edited by Terrell Carver and James Farr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Levitas, Ruth. *The Concept of Utopia.* New York: Philip Allan, 1990.

Liedman, Sven-Eric. *A World to Win: The Life and Works of Karl Marx.* Translated by Jeffrey N. Skinner. London and New York: Verso, 2018.

Locke, John. *Political Writings.* Edited by David Wootton. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1993.

Madison, James. "The Federalist No. 54: The Apportionment of Members of the House of Representatives among the States." In *The Federalist Papers*, edited by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay and Ian Shapiro. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Malcolm, Noel. "Hobbes's Theory of International Relations." In *Aspects of Hobbes*, edited by Noel Malcolm. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002.

———. "A Summary Biography of Hobbes." In *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, edited by Tom Sorrell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

———, ed. *Thomas Hobbes: Leviathan, Volume 1: Editorial Introduction.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012.

Manuel, Frank E. *The New World of Henri Saint-Simon.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956.

———, ed. *Utopias and Utopian Thought.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1967.

March, Andrew F. "What is Comparative Political Theory?" *The Review of Politics* 71, no. 4 (Fall 2009), 531-565

Martin, James. "The Rhetoric of the *Manifesto.*" In *The Cambridge Companion to the Communist Manifesto*, edited by Terrell Carver and James Farr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Martin, Rex. "The Ideal State in Plato's *Republic.*" *History of Political Thought* 2, no. 1 (1981): 1-30.

Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 3, Marx and Engels: 1843-44.* London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975.

———. *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 4, Marx and Engels: 1844-45.* London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975.

———. *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 5, Marx and Engels: 1845-47.* London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976.

———. *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 6: Marx and Engels: 1845-48.* London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976.

———. *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 11, Marx and Engels: 1851-53.* London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979.

———. *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 24, Marx and Engels: 1874-83.* London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989.

———. *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 25: Frederick Engels: Anti-Dühring, Dialectics of Nature.* London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987.

———. *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 29, Marx: 1857-1861.* London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987.

———. *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works [MECW] Volume 35: Karl Marx, Capital Vol I.* London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1996.

———. *The Communist Manifesto.* Edited by Gareth Stedman Jones. London: Penguin, 2002.

Mash, Roy. "How Important for Philosophers Is the History of Philosophy?". *History and Theory* 26, no. 3 (1987): 289-99.

Maslow, Abraham H. *Motivation and Personality.* Third ed. New York: Longman, 1970.

Mason, Pamela A. "The Genevan Republican Background to Rousseau's *Social Contract.*" *History of Political Thought* 14, no. 4 (1993): 547-72.

Matthew, Colin. "Introduction: The United Kingdom and the Victorian Century, 1815-1901." In *The Nineteenth Century: The British Isles, 1815-1901*, edited by Colin Matthew. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

McKeen, Catherine. "Swillsburg City Limits (the 'City of Pigs': *Republic* 370c-372d)." *Polis: The Journal for Ancient Greek Political Thought* 21, no. 1-2 (2004): 70-92.

McNeilly, Frederic Stewart. *The Anatomy of Leviathan.* London: Macmillan, 1968.

Mészáros, István. "The Legacy of 1848 and the Dilemmas of Democratic Revolutions." In *The Social Question and the Democratic Revolution: Marx and the Legacy of 1848*, edited by Douglas Moggach and Paul Leduc Browne. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2000.

Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty* and *The Subjection of Women.* Edited by Alan Ryan. London: Penguin, 2006.

Ministry of Transport. "Road to Zero: A New Road Safety Strategy for NZ." accessed August 2020, https://www.transport.govt.nz/multi-modal/keystrategiesandplans/road-safety-strategy/.

Mitchell, Basil, and J.R. Lucas. *An Engagement with Plato's Republic: A Companion to the Republic.* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.

More, Thomas. *Utopia.* Edited and Translated by Paul Turner. London: Penguin, 1965.

———. *Utopia.* Translated by Robert M. Adams. Edited by George M. Logan. Third ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Morgan, James. "Species Being in the Twenty-First Century." *Review of Political Economy* 30, no. 3 (2018): 377-95.

Morrill, John. "The Religious Context of the English Civil War." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 34 (1984): 155-78.

Morrison, Donald R. "The Utopian Character of Plato's Ideal City." In *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, edited by G. R. F. Ferrari, 232-55. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Moylan, Tom. *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination.* New York and London: Methuen, 1986.

Nagel, Thomas. "What Makes a Political Theory Utopian?". *Social Research* 56, no. 4 (1989): 903-20.

Nails, Debra. "The Life of Plato of Athens." In *A Companion to Plato*, edited by Hugh H. Benson. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006.

———. *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics.* Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002.

———. "Plato's *Republic* in Its Athenian Context." *History of Political Thought* 33, no. 1 (2012): 1-23.

National Aeronautic and Space Admistration. "Aerodynamics Research Revolutionizes Truck Design." NASA Spinoff. 2008, Accessed May 2022, https://spinoff.nasa.gov/Spinoff2008/t_3.html.

New Zealand House of Representatives. "Taxation (Budget 2021 and Remedial Measures) Bill—First Reading." 22 May 2021, accessed June 2021, https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/rhr/combined/HansDeb_20210520_20210520_40.

———. "Taxation (Budget 2021 and Remedial Measures) Bill—Second Reading." 22 May 2021, accessed June 2021, https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/rhr/combined/HansDeb_20210520_20210520_44.

Newey, Glen. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hobbes and Leviathan.* London and New York: Routledge, 2008.

Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia.* Oxford: Basic Books, 1974.

Nyberg, Daniel. "Corporations, Politics, and Democracy: Corporate Political Activities as Political Corruption." *Organization Theory* 2 (2021): 1-24.

Office for National Statistics. "Electoral Statistics, UK: December 2020." accessed May 2021, https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/elections/electoralregistration/bulletins/electoralstatisticsforuk/december2020.

Online Etymology Dictionary. "Idea (Adj.)." 2019, accessed May 2019, https://www.etymonline.com/word/ideal.

Orr, D. Alan. "Sovereignty, Supremacy and the Origins of the English Civil War." *History* 87, no. 288 (2002): 474-90.

Overton, Mark. *Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy 1500-1850.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Owen, Robert. *The Book of the New Moral World, Containing the Rational System of Society, Founded on Demonstrable Facts, Developing the Constitution and Laws of Human Nature and of Society.* London: E. Wilson, 1836.

Palmer, R. R. *The Age of the Democractic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800.* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Pandey, Janardan. "Democratic Ideal State and the Hind Swaraj." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 1 (1988): 40-46.

Parkin, Jon. *Taming the Leviathan: The Reception of the Political and Religious Ideas of Thomas Hobbes in England, 1640-1700.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Parrish, John M. "Education, Erasmian Humanism, and More's *Utopia*." In *Ideas of Education: Philosophy and Politics from Plato to Dewey*, edited by Christopher Brooke and Elizabeth Frazer. London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

Patterson-Tutschka, Monicka. "Hobbes Smashes Cromwell and the Rump: An Interpretation of *Leviathan*." *Political Theory* 43, no. 5 (2015): 631-56.

Peters, Richard. *Hobbes.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956.

Plato. *Plato: Republic.* Edited by C.D.C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004.

Polišenský, Josef. *Aristocrats and the Crowd in the Revolutionary Year 1848: A Contribution to the History of Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Austria.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1980.

Pope, Maurice. "Thucydides and Democracy." *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 37, no. 3 (1988): 276-96.

Popper, Karl. *The Open Society and Its Enemies I: The Spell of Plato.* Fifth ed. London: Kegan Paul, 1966.

Portides, Demetris. "Models." In *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Science*, edited by Martin Curd and Stathis Psillos. London and New York: Routledge, 2014.

Prior, Charles W.A. "Religion, Political Thought and the English Civil War." *History Compass* 11, no. 1 (2013): 24-42.

Proudhon, Pierre-Joseph. *What Is Property?* , Edited and Translated by Donald R. Kelley and Bonnie G. Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Qvortrup, Mads. *The Political Philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Impossibility of Reason.* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003.

Rakove, Jack N., ed. *The Annotated U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.

Rapport, Mike. *1848: Year of Revolution.* New York: Basic Books, 2008.

Rawls, John. *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

———. *A Theory of Justice.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971.

Rhodes, P.J. *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.

Riley, Patrick. "The General Will before Rousseau: The Contributions of Arnauld, Pascal, Malebranch, Bayle, and Bossuet." In *The General Will: The Evolution of a Concept*, edited by James Farr and David Lay Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Roberts, J.W. *City of Sokrates: An Introduction to Classical Athens.* Second ed. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.

Roberts, Jessica Tolbert. "Arginusae Once Again." *The Classical World* 71, no. 2 (1977): 107-11.

Robertson, Priscilla. *Revolutions of 1848: A Social History.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952.

Robeyns, Ingrid. "Ideal Theory in Theory and Practice." *Social Theory and Practice* 34, no. 3 (2008): 341-62.

Rosenberg, Alex *Philosophy of Science: A Contemporary Introduction.* Second ed. New York and London: Routledge, 2005.

Rosenblatt, Helena. *Rousseau and Geneva: From the First Discourse to the Social Contract, 1749-1762.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Of the Social Contract and Other Political Writings.* Translated by Quintin Hoare. Edited by Christopher Bertram. London: Penguin, 2012.

Royle, Trevor. *Civil War: The Wars of the Three Kingdoms, 1638-1660.* London: Little, Brown, 2004.

Rubel, Alexander. *Fear and Loathing in Ancient Athens: Religion and Politics During the Peloponnesian War.* Translated by Michael Vickers and Alina Piftor. Durham: Acumen, 2014.

Russell, Bertrand. *History of Western Philosophy.* New ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.

Ryan, Alan. "Hobbes's Political Philosophy." In *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, edited by Tom Sorrell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Sargent, Lyman Tower. "Authority & Utopia: Utopianism in Political Thought." *Polity* 14, no. 4 (1982): 565-84.

———. "Five Hundred Years of Thomas More's Utopia and Utopianism." *Utopian Studies* 27, no. 2, SPECIAL ISSUE: On the Commemoration of the Five Hundredth Anniversary of Thomas More's Utopia (2016): 184-92.

———. *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Sayers, Sean. *Marx & Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Scenters-Zapico, John. "The Case for the Sophists." *Rhetoric Review* 11, no. 2 (1993): 352-67.

Schaer, Roland. "Utopia: Space, Time, History." Translated by Nadia Beuabid. In *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*, edited by Roland Schaer, Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with The New York Public Library, 2000.

Schofield, Malcolm. "The Noble Lie." In *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, edited by G.R.F. Ferrari. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

———. *Plato: Political Philosophy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Schuhmann, Karl. "Leviathan and De Cive." In *Leviathan after 350 Years*, edited by Tom Sorrell and Luc Foisneau. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Schwartz, Pedro. "The *Communist Manifesto* and the Lure of Scientific Socialism." *Iberian Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 5, no. 2 (2018): 103-11.

Sedley, David. "Philosophy, the Forms, and the Art of Ruling." In *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, edited by G.R.F. Ferrari. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Severns, Maggie. "Warren Re-Ups Bill to Ban Stock Trading by Lawmakers." 18/12/2020, accessed June 2021, https://www.politico.com/news/2020/12/18/elizabeth-warren-stock-trading-ban-448390.

Seymour, David. "Twitter / @Dbseymour "Labour MP and Socialist . . ."." 20 May 2021, June 2021, https://twitter.com/dbseymour/status/1395296519402651649.

Shaw-Taylor, Leigh, and E.A. Wrigley. "Occupational Structure and Population Change." In *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain*, edited by Roderick Floud, Jane Humphries and Paul Johnson. Vol. I: 1700-1870, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Sherman, Howard. "Marx and Determinism." *Journal of Economic Issues* 15, no. 1 (1981): 61-71.

Sim, Stuart, and David Waller. *The Discourse of Sovereignty, Hobbes to Fielding: The State of Nature and the Nature of the State.* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.

Simpson, Matthew. *Rousseau: A Guide for the Perplexed.* London: Continuum, 2007.

Skinner, Quentin. *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought.* Vol. 1: The Renaissance, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.

Sommerville, Johann. "*Leviathan* and Its Anglican Context." In *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's Leviathan*, edited by Patricia Springborg. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Sorrell, Tom. "Hobbes, Locke and the State of Nature." In *Studies on Locke: Sources, Contemporaries, and Legacy*, edited by Sarah Hutton and Paul Schuurmann. Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer, 2008.

———. "Introduction." In *Leviathan after 350 Years*, edited by Tom Sorrell and Luc Foisneau. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Sparks, Chris, and Stuart Isaacs. *Political Theorists in Context.* London and New York: Routledge, 2004.

Spector, Céline. *Rousseau.* Cambridge: Polity, 2019.

Spehar, Warren E. "The Militia Ordinance of 1642 and the 14th-Century Great Statute of *Praemunire*." *Parliamentary History* 35, no. 2 (2016): 111-31.

Sperber, Jonathan. *The European Revolutions, 1848-1851.* Second ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

———. *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life.* New York and London: Liverlight, 2013.

Spinoza, Baruch de. "Political Treatise." In *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, edited by Edwin Curley. Vol. 2, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Stemplowska, Zofia, and Adam Swift. "Ideal and Nonideal Theory." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, edited by David Estlund. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Struhl, Karsten J. "Marx and Human Nature: The Historical, the Trans-Historical, and Human Flourishing." *Science and Society* 80, no. 1 (2016): 78-104.

Suchting, W.A. *Marx: An Introduction.* Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1983.

Taxpayers' Union. "Twitter / @Taxpayersunion "Reminder . . ."." 22 May 2021, accessed June 2021, https://twitter.com/TaxpayersUnion/status/1395910028570382338.

Taylor, A.J.P. *The Origins of the Second World War.* Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1969.

The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. "Mount Cook." 2011, accessed May 2020, https://www.britannica.com/place/Mount-Cook.

———. "Mount Ruapehu." 2018, accessed May 2020, https://www.britannica.com/place/Mount-Ruapehu.

Thomson, John A.F. *The Transformation of Medieval England, 1370-1529.* London and New York: Longman, 1983.

Thorley, John. *Athenian Democracy.* Second ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.

Thucydides. *The Peloponnesian War.* Translated by Steven Lattimore. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998.

Tocqueville, Alexis de. *The Recollections of Alexis De Tocqueville.* Translated by Alexander Teixeira de Mattos. London: The Harvill Press, 1948.

Tritle, Lawrence A. *A New History of the Peloponnesian War.* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Tuck, Richard. "The Utopianism of Leviathan." In *Leviathan after 350 Years*, edited by Tom Sorrell and Luc Foisneau. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Valentini, Laura. "Ideal Vs. Non-Ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map." *Philosophy Compass* 7, no. 9 (2012): 654-64.

Vallance, Edward. "Preaching to the Converted: Religious Justifications for the English Civil War." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65, no. 3/4 (2002): 395-419.

Vieira, Fátima. "The Concept of Utopia." In *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, edited by Gregory Claeys. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Vision Zero Network. "What Is Vision Zero?", accessed May 2019, https://visionzeronetwork.org/about/what-is-vision-zero/.

Vlastos, Gregory. "Did Slavery Exist in Plato's *Republic*?". *Classical Philology* 63, no. 4 (1968): 291-95.

———. "Was Plato a Feminist?". In *Studies in Greek Philosophy*, edited by Gregory Vlastos. Vol. II: Socrates, Plato, and Their Tradition, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Wanlass, Lawrence C., ed. *Gettell's History of Political Thought*. Second ed. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953.

Warren, Elizabeth. "A Bill to Improve the Anti-Corruption and Public Integrity Laws, and for Other Purposes." 2021, accessed June 2021, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Anti-Corruption%20and%20Public%20Integrity%20Act%20of%202020.pdf.

Wartenberg, Thomas E. ""Species-Being" and "Human Nature" in Marx." *Human Studies* 5, no. 2 (1982): 77-95.

Watson, Richard A. "What Is the History of Philosophy and Why Is It Important?". *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40, no. 4 (2002): 525-28.

Webb, Darren. "Where's the Vision? The Concept of Utopia in Contemporary Educational Theory." *Oxford Review of Education* 35, no. 6 (2009): 743-60.

Whatmore, Richard. *Against War and Empire: Geneva, Britain, and France in the Eighteenth Century.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.

Wieland, Christoph Martin. *Socrates out of His Senses: Or Dialogues of Diogenes of Sinope.* Translated by Mr Wintersted. Vol. II, Newburgh: D. Denniston, 1797.

Wilde, Lawrence. *Thomas More's Utopia: Arguing for Social Justice.* Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2017.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Soul of Man under Socialism.* London: Arthur L. Humphreys, 1919.

Williams, David Lay. *Rousseau's Social Contract: An Introduction.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

———. "The Substantive Elements of Rousseau's General Will." In *The General Will: The Evolution of a Concept*, edited by James Farr and David Lay Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Wilson, A.N. *The Victorians.* London: Hutchinson, 2002.

Wolpert, Andrew. *Remembering Defeat: Civil War and Civic Memory in Ancient Athens.* Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

———. "The Violence of the Thirty Tyrants." In *Ancient Tyranny*, edited by Sian Lewis. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

Wood, Allen W. *Karl Marx.* 2nd ed. New York and London: Routledge, 2004.

Wood, Neal. *John Locke and Agrarian Capitalism.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984.

Woolrych, Austin. *Britain in Revolution, 1625-1660.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Worden, Blair. *The English Civil Wars, 1640-1660.* London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2009.

Worsley, Peter. *Marx and Marxism.* Revised ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

Wrightson, Keith. *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000.

Wrigley, E.A., and R.S. Schofield. *The Population History of England, 1541-1871: A Reconstruction.* London: Edward Arnold, 1981.

Xenophon. *The Hellenica (Greek History) of Xenophon of Athens: A Facing-Page Critical Edition and Translation from Greek into English.* Edited by Donald F. Jackson and Ralph E. Doty. Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Pellen Press, 2006.

Zarka, Yves Charles. *Hobbes and Modern Political Thought.* Translated by James Griffith. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016.