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Return to Rhetoric
A Case For Co-operative Discussion

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I
Introduction

Many contemporary students of democracy, normative or empirical, analyze the concepts of majority rule, equality, and representation. But Sir Ernest Barker writes in his translation of Aristotle's *Politics*:

It is thus not an unfair gloss to suggest that Aristotle by implication assumes that the dialectic of debate is the final foundation of the principle of popular government, in so far as he accepts that principle. In other words, democracy is based upon discussion.1

Today the idea that discussion constitutes the primary characteristic of democracy initially strikes the mind as either paradoxical or misguided. Many persons think free elections and majority rule are the central features of democracy. However, I wish to explore various views of the interrelationship between the concepts of decentralized democracies, modes of discussion, and types of ethical standards. We are seeking to explicate a correlation between ethical standards, decentralized democracies and policy decisions made by means of various discussion processes. In order to simplify the problem, the multiplicity of possible views have been reduced to two major positions. I have labeled them the modern individualistic and ancient, communal philosophies. Writers supporting both points of view prefer a decentralized democratic governmental system in contrast to a centralized, bureaucratic or tyrannical system and challenge their opponents with the assertion that the adoption of their adversaries position will produce destruction of freedom, or autocratic, centralized government. In brief, the modern individualistic group adheres to an ethic of economic or self-interest, decentralized democracy and partisan discussion; whereas the second position, the ancient communalism advocates, value the common good, decentralized democracy and co-operative discussion. If democracy presupposes discussion, what type of ethical system best corresponds with it, modern, possessive-individua-

alism or some form of a consensual creed in which the common good is a key principle? In other words, can a decentralized political system work in which there are no common ethical criteria except economic or individual self-interest? Another related issue is whether a decentralized democratic system best corresponds with a communal-consensual ethical system in which policy decisions are made by means of co-operative discussion or with a system in which decisions are a balance of self-interest. More specifically, in order to discuss these problems in greater detail in this essay I have chosen to contrast some classical theorists with a few advocates of modern possessive individualism. First, the case that partisan discussion and individualism best correspond with decentralized democracy is stated. Then the position of the proponents of cooperative discussion is summarized. In conclusion, I present and defend the thesis that cooperative discussion along the lines advocated by the classical Greek theorists most adequately corresponds with decentralized democratic government.

II

Modern Individualism

Modern individualism is a major economic and political tradition. Some insist that its roots are found in Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations, and Thomas Hobbes’ Leviathan. In “Marginal Notes on Reading Political Philosophy,” James M. Buchanan says philosophical individualism which he associates with Hume, Locke and Kant, bases political obligation on self-interest and conventional rules of conduct. Here, individuals make decisions and the state derives from rational calculations of self-interest. In America John C. Calhoun and William Graham Sumner expounded varieties of this philosophy. Two recent works within this tradition, Anthony Down’s An Economic Theory of Democracy and

2 C. B. McPherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes To Locke (London: Oxford University Press, 1962) p. 273. McPherson reduces the liberal-individualist tradition to seven assumptions. He recognizes that within an individualistically based society there is a serious problem with maintenance of social cohesion. “The further condition is that there be a cohesion of self-interests, among all those who have a voice in choosing the government, sufficient to offset centrifugal forces of a possessive market society. This constitution was fulfilled, in the heyday of the market society, by the fact that a political voice was restricted to a possessing class which had sufficient cohesion to decide periodically, without anarchy, who should have the sovereign power. As long as this condition was fulfilled there was a sufficient basis for an autonomous theory of obligation of the individual to a constitutional liberal state.”


Charles Lindblom’s *The Intelligence of Democracy* will be considered here.

Anthony Downs asks what motivates men to pursue political careers and what constitutes rational political decisions. Rationality and realism require that one make the assumption men pursue their own interest in order to obtain income, prestige and power. Only individuals have ends/goals, and there is no such thing as a common good or general welfare for the community. Yet, Downs asserts communal consensus or some form of conventional standards are necessary. The problem emerges of how they are to be formulated given the prior assertion of the non-existence of a common good. According to Downs a stable democracy cannot exist without extensive ideological consensus. A democratic government would not be effective in a conflict ridden community divided into two equal camps because this would produce stalemate. He thinks democracy both presupposes and requires consensus about goals but not perfect agreement. Thus Downs thinks the self-interested individual must seek satisfaction within the ethical constraints imposed by conventional, consensus norms or the Judeo-Christian morality. The problem of how serious differences over such issues as, for example, state funding of birth control measures would be handled, is not resolved. In other words, this individual consent model is only viable with the assumption added that policy decisions are confined within the boundaries of conventional Christianity and not extended to those controversial areas which divide Christians.

Charles Lindblom’s contributions to this tradition are of major significance. His ethical position closely resembles Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarian calculus. According to Lindblom, individuals have different, often

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5 Ibid., pp. 4, 28. Cf. James Q. Wilson and Edward C. Banfield, “Political Ethos Revisited.” *American Political Science Review*, LXV (December, 1971), pp. 1048-1062. Wilson and Banfield identify two opinion groups in contemporary American which they call “holists” and “localists.” The holist view is said to be associated with middle-class Anglo Saxon Protestant origins whereas the other view is combined with an immigrant, working-class ethos. The unitarist view stresses community service, the public interest, honesty, obligation to assume civic responsibilities and impartiality in law enforcement. The localists favor people-helping items, increases in welfare payments and people-helping conceptions as the primary function of a governmental system.

6 Ibid., pp. 289, 15. Cf. Murray Eldeman, *Politics As Symbolic Action: Mass Arousal and Quiescence* (Chicago: Markham Publishing Company, 1971), pp. 46, 69, 81, 51, Eldeman presents an individualistic-psychological interpretation of the role that political discussion performs in a democratic society. According to his view, discussion helps deviates to accept policy defects, and opponents to adjust to disliked decisions. Political speeches appeal to deep seated anxieties impulses, fears, needs, desires and urges. “It appears that those who can be expected to benefit substantially in status or money from belief in a myth are especially susceptible; they are inclined to translate their interests in status and money into the terms of a myth that defines their behavior as serving the public interest.”

7 Ibid., pp. 114, 162.
conflicting, values which are not equal. "Good" political decisions require clarification of stable key values and involve difficult serious thought about how values are linked with preferred public policy decisions. The formulation of "well-considered" values requires leadership. Values can also be collective, and widely shared, in contrast with private particular values. He asserts that it is impossible to formulate an aggregate definition of the public interest.

Universal or general political criteria such as majority preference or equality are inadequate or ambiguous and of no help in solving complex problems of public policy formulation. He does recognize the existence of what Lindblom calls conventions and the rules of the game.

It might be suggested, then, that the overwhelming commitment to democracy of, say, American citizens takes the form of verbal commitment to loose and abstract principles that are quite inadequate for application, and of habits of political behavior that proximately support democratic government. Given the habits repression is at a minimum, and government is consented to even in the absence of consensus on less loose and abstract principles.

In this situation where no really useful common standards of ethics exist, the partisan is one who makes decisions calculated to serve his own good or his definition of the public interest. According to Lindblom:

... there are no bedrock social preferences or social values; every value held is a product of and is continuously reconsidered in the light of existing circumstances, especially those that bear on the probability of our satisfying our preferences.

Since individuals have interests which conflict and since there are no generally accepted criteria, guidelines, general ethical principles or rules, co-ordination should be achieved by means of "mutual partisan adjustment" rather than by force. Any common values are created in this government by consent. Lindblom concludes that the only other alternatives for the achievement of agreement, a social-political contract having been omitted, would be either central direction or a non-democratic government. The co-operative discussion process model with its shared common value system or code, he thinks, necessarily requires a chief co-ordinator, or a highly centralized, non-democratic, administrative state. Among the

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9 Ibid., pp. 277, 283, 286, 287.

10 Ibid., p. 263.

11 Ibid., p. 209.
many devices he considers to attain a public decision in the face of conflicting interests and views are negotiation, bargaining and partisan discussion. Negotiation, Lindblom says, includes appeals, threats and promises. Discussion involves a reappraisal of partisan interests and the means to satisfy them. Partisan mutual adjustment arises when no common values can be formulated for testing public policies.\textsuperscript{12} Partisan discussion is defined as:

\textit{... A form of partisan mutual adjustment in which X, as a recognized condition of making his own decision effective, induces a response from Y by effecting through communications a reappraisal by Y of his partisan interests and the means to satisfy those without X's actually altering the objective consequences for Y of any of his possible responses, where Y may or may not, in a symmetrical relation, do the same with respect to X.}\textsuperscript{13}

Partisan mutual adjustment by means of discussion promotes agreement on values by modification elimination and creation of values so that conflict between them can be replaced by co-ordination, consent and agreement. According to Lindblom, this process involves weighing different values against each other, appropriately sacrificing amounts of some values to others and recognizing that not all values are equal.\textsuperscript{14} Values are counted differently according to the authority or position held by the participants, and they alter from situation to situation. The more widely shared a value, interest or preference, the heavier its weight in partisan adjustment. In addition, Lindblom thinks the intensity with which a value is held by an individual is added to this calculus.\textsuperscript{15} Decisions reached this way promote stability agreement, action, democratic decentralization and moderation.

The defects of co-operative discussion Lindblom mentions are that it requires a centralized co-ordinator and it assumes that people wholly accept and do not resist the centralist's decisions when discussion fails. According to Lindblom, paralysis in political decision-making ensues if one attempts to reach agreement on prior values rather than on specific policy statements whereas specific policy decisions can be achieved with general consent even if people differ on general value standards. Co-operative discussions are muddy and leave values poorly understood, ill-defined, and abstract. It produces rigidity in thinking which precludes shifting or abandoning values, and the variety of appeals is limited. The

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., pp. 55, 74, 263.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 71. Italics in original.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., pp. 207, 244.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., pp. 227, 235, 237, 240, 242, 244.
group is paralyzed until it finds values on which it is willing to declare its agreement.\textsuperscript{16}

The modern individualist tradition starting from the realistic premise that men are motivated in their political actions and decisions by the pursuit of self-interest draws the conclusion that there is no such entity as a common good. However, recognizing some need for sufficient agreement to make collective action possible, all of the theorists here considered suggest such devices unanimity, weak consensus about democracy, support for the rules of the game, and also conventional support for the basic principles of the Judeo-Christian religions. Lindblom suggests the utilization of what he calls partisan mutual adjustment and discussion where no common values exists as a basis for public policies. Lindblom's model, in view of his acceptance of the proposition of a society with no common values, is a brilliant effort to provide some workable solution to the very serious problem of how such a society is to provide for any public policy without resorting to coercive governmental implementation of policies upon individuals whose values may differ sharply. The empirical problem of whether any society or government actually exists where there are no common values, no consensus or convention is another issue.

But, let us now turn to the case presented by the ancient communalists.

III

Ancient Communalism

In the ancient Greek polis, political oratory flourished, decisions in the assembly flowed from public discussions, and the art of verbal communication developed from a skill to an art and then was formulated by Aristotle into a science. Perhaps the Greeks were so interested in the art of decision-making by discussion precisely because their political system originated prior to the invention of the printing press and the computer. My analysis of ancient communalism starts with a brief consideration of Plato's \textit{Gorgias} and \textit{Phaedrus} as representative of the cooperative discussion position. This study of the ancients also includes parts of Plato's \textit{Republic} and Aristotle's \textit{Rhetoric}. Despite the important philosophic differences between Plato and Aristotle on many issues, here I consider them as mutual participants in a continuously developing tradition. From this prospective Aristotle's \textit{Rhetoric} is viewed as establishing a "science" to replace the abuses of the Sophists stressed by Plato. This "new science" was first suggested as an intellectual project by Plato in the \textit{Phaedrus}. Plato's \textit{Republic} provides us with a symbolic model of

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., pp. 108, 140, 220, 221, 222.
the ideal discussion process. I conclude this section with a summary of the essential propositions in the ancient communal model which assumes the existence of a common good and prefers the co-operative discussion process.

In Plato's *Gorgias* we find the first philosophic investigation of rhetoric. It is defined as "the ability to persuade with words judges in law courts, senators in the Senate, assembly men in the Assembly, and men in any other meeting which convenes for the public interests." Whereas the philosopher is concerned with dialectic, logic and discussion, the student of rhetoric investigates the art of persuasion. The good teacher of rhetoric need not be a Sophist, according to Plato. A true rhetorician must first be a just man who seeks the common good rather than his own private interest. The man who teaches only with a view to promoting his own self-interest and without regard for the truth does not serve the welfare of the community. The primary responsibility of the statesman is the improvement of his fellow citizens without toadyng to their lowest desires. Teachers of rhetoric should realize that discussions need to be conducted without destroying the bonds of friendship which are necessary in order to maintain communal cohesion and order. According to Plato, the cosmos, heaven, and earth are held together by the virtue of sharing, by friendship, self-control and justice. Political discussants should remember that these important ends place limits upon verbal exchanges.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato claims that any adequate science of rhetoric must first be concerned with the analysis of the soul or psychology. One should investigate what kinds of discussion affect which types of personality and why persuasion works with some persons and not with others. He dismisses other contemporary studies of rhetoric as defective because they are not in his estimation "scientific." The student of rhetoric should proceed to try out his theories by testing them against his sense experiences. Plato outlines high standards to be met by any future student of rhetoric.

But it is only when he can state adequately what sort of man is persuaded by what sort of speech; when he has the capacity to declare himself with complete perception, in the presence of another, that here is the man and here the nature that was discussed theoretically at school—here, now, present to him in actuality—to which he must apply this kind of speech in this sort of manner in order to obtain

18 Ibid., p. 24.
19 Ibid., p. 83.
persuasion for this kind of activity—it is only when he can do all this and when he has, in addition, grasped the concept of propriety of time—when to speak and when to hold his tongue, when to use and when not to use brachylogy, in a word, each of the specific devices of discourse he may have studied—it is only then and not until then that the finishing and perfecting touches will have been given to his science.20

Socrates and his friends in The Republic state what I take to be Plato’s answer to the evil of sophistry. Socratic dialectical discussion is proposed as the ideal mode for philosophic and political inquiry. What, briefly, is philosophic discussion, what is the dialetical method, who can participate in discussion, what are the prerequisites for philosophic discussion? Discussion requires adherence to basic logical rules in order to construct good definitions and to provide a common understanding of the terms used. This, Plato thinks, is a necessary preliminary step in the construction of an argument or case. To learn to discuss is a difficult thing, a skill or art which involves comprehending your fellow participant’s position prior to attempting its refutation. One has first to listen and understand.21 Unexpressed common assumptions need to be made explicit.22 When the participants reach agreement, the discussion may then proceed forward. Psychological attitudes are important. If one is not capable of discussion without extreme anger or emotional disturbance, he is not fit for or able to discuss philosophic questions fruitfully. One must not assume he knows all of the answers before the discussion begins; discussion is not a trick game of sophomores refuting each other. Plato writes one must be a mature adult with a balanced personality, sufficient interest and a mind open to reason.23 Interpersonal agreement between discussants is a means of checking the truthfulness of the definition, which should also meet tests of universality and logical consistency.24 Maturity, wisdom, intelligence, fairness, honesty, temperance, moderation and courage are qualities needed to be a good discussant. Questions must be put fairly, no possible answers should be eliminated before the pursuit is begun, one agrees only if he honestly agrees. If a discussant changes his mind in the course of a discussion, he should point

22 Ibid., 335b.
23 Ibid., 539d.
24 Ibid., 336e.
this out to the others.\textsuperscript{25} One should eliminate abusive personal attacks, speech should be precise, and a serious intent should motivate him for “what we seek is genuine agreement concerning the important issues in life.”\textsuperscript{26} Discussion also requires the right kind of emotive environment: a mood of extreme hostility between disputants impedes interchange between truth-seekers. A friendly, trusting, receptive sympathetic audience is best.\textsuperscript{27}

According to Plato there are important differences between a debate and a philosophic discussion.

“Now,” I said, “if we should speak at length against him, setting speech against speech, telling how many good things belong to being just and then he should speak in return, and we again, there’ll be need of counting the good things and measuring how many each of us has in each speech, and then we’ll be in need of some sort of judges who will decide. But if we consider just as we did a moment ago, coming to agreement with one another we’ll ourselves be both judges and pleaders at once.”\textsuperscript{28}

In the discussion process one seeks the consent of other persons. Here the discussants combine the functions of advocate and judge and proceed by asking questions, discussing problems and reaching agreement on first points before proceeding to the second. Superficial, compact answers or slogans are not acceptable. One looks deeper into issues, knows, elaborates and discusses premises, draws accurate conclusions from premises, rejects absurd conclusions and defective, deficient definitions and searches for the most universal definition.\textsuperscript{29}

In summary, Plato establishes the points that discussion is different from debate, that it has prerequisites and rules, that it begins with proper definitions of terms and that it requires a certain personality type. A final conclusion he reaches is that the restoration of the art of philosophic discussion is an essential plank in his reform program for Greek democracy. Plato vigorously criticizes the typical meeting of the democratic assembly. He suggests several ways to improve public discussion with the hope that division, discord, disunity and hostility would be replaced by friendly agreement upon wise solutions to difficult problems produced after extensive consideration.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 337b, 339b, 340c, 342d.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 350e, 351a, 350d.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 450d, 451a, b.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 348a.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 368.
“When,” I said, “many gathered together sit down in assemblies, courts, theaters, army camps, or any other common meeting of the multitude, and with a great deal of uproar, blame some of the things said or done, and praise others, both in excess, shouting and clapping; and besides, the rocks and the very place surrounding them echo and redouble the uproar of blame and praise.”

A government in which decisions are reached by reasoned discussion requires that persons determined to rule by persuasion rather than by force predominate in the community. They should possess the requisite abilities and skills to rule by means of discussion. In Book Eight Plato concludes that rule by reason is not possible where untrained persons predominate, which he assumes would be the case in a direct participatory democracy. He has set his standards for philosophic discussion so high that its achievement would require a regime controlled by specially educated philosopher kings. Plato saw a relationship between the spread of sophistry and the decline of the polis and proposed the teaching of skills in philosophic discussion as a restorative measure. However, philosopher kings are different from political orators and disputants in the rough and tumble every day decision-making about public policy.

Aristotle reshapes philosophical discussion into an instrument more suited to the realities of politics. Political science should include a careful study of the art of verbal persuasion because it is the major means utilized by the politician to gain his ends. So the Rhetoric, often neglected by political theorists, is the necessary companion volume to the Politics and the Ethics. In the Rhetoric Aristotle asks; if rational speech is more distinctive of man than the use of physical force, should he be more ashamed of himself if he cannot defend himself with speech than if he fails to defend himself with arms? It is the art of public speaking, concerned with the methods of persuasion and demonstration, which teaches a man how to influence the decisions of the lawgivers, the members of assemblies and juries. According to Aristotle, there are three major areas of persuasion; first, by means of influence of the speaker’s personal character; second, by manipulation of the listener’s emotions; and third, by means of the content of a speech where the truth is proven by means of argument. Both ethical and rhetorical studies are related to political science, and are different from the dialectical argumentation utilized by philosophers.

30 Ibid., 492c.
32 Ibid., 135 6a-b.
The duty of rhetoric is to deal with such matters as we deliberate upon without arts, or systems to guide us, in the hearing of persons who cannot take in at a glance a complicated argument, or follow a long chain of reasoning. The subjects of our deliberation are such as seem to present us with alternative possibilities; about things that could not have been, and cannot now or in the future be, other than they are, nobody who takes them to be of this nature wastes his time in deliberation.  

The orator is concerned with things to be done in the future and urges people either to do or not to do something. Political speeches, therefore, aim at proving either the expediency or good, or the harmfulness or evil, of actions. Just and good deeds are actions done for the sake of others or for one’s benefactors.

Aristotle speculates that rhetoric is a combination of the science of logic and political ethics with a dash of sophistical reasoning added for spice. There are five main subject areas for political speakers. These are ways and means, war and peace, national defense, imports and exports, and legislation. According to him, assertive, self-seeking makes friendship difficult if not impossible. Aristotle writes that in his estimation the political speaker’s aim is utility, to determine not ends but the means to ends, i.e., what it is useful to do. In politics, he thinks, goodness and utility are synonymous.

In Book I of the Rhetoric Aristotle systematically relates the orator’s art to other areas of knowledge. The projected model of the skilled political leader is very different from either the philosopher king, the statesman, or the Chicago boss. He is preeminently a man of experience, reason and practicality. Yet he also retains his nobility and humor. Here the role of political science is educational since the most important and effective qualification for successful persuasion is to be well-informed about different governmental systems. In addition, the politician needs to understand what other people’s interests are since this is a key to inducing them to formulate favorable decisions. The study of social ethics assists him by lending information by means of which he can direct his appeals to the particular moral characteristics of different cultures.

In Book II of the Rhetoric, Aristotle aims to teach an aspiring leader how to influence a group to make decisions he thinks best. The three keys

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33 Ibid., 1357c.
34 Ibid., 1359.
36 Ibid., 1362a.
37 Ibid., 1365-1366.
to success in this project are good sense, good moral character and good will.\textsuperscript{38} An additional subject matter to be mastered is psychology—the analysis of the human motivational-emotional structure, or knowledge of the soul. The remainder of this book contains his analysis of the logical elements involved in political discussions, which are much too complex for detailed consideration here.\textsuperscript{39} In general Aristotle says that all effective arguments are founded upon an adequate knowledge of the facts and the subject-matter.

In summary, I would like to re-formulate ancient communalism into five propositions. First, civic virtue and public standards for policy decisions are to be based upon rational consideration of group interest and the common good which is assumed to exist. Second, political leadership should be by means of rational peaceful discussion which assumes some qualifications, ability and training in the art and science of rhetoric, an important division of political science. Third, a healthy state of co-operative discussion is said to be vitally necessary for the continued well-being of the polis. Discussions must be conducted without destroying the bonds of friendship. Excessive vituperation, bitterness and personalized attacks are beyond the limits of permissible modes of discussion. Assertive self-seeking destroys friendship and hence tends to undermine the unity necessary to a polis. Fourth, the ancient authors knew the effects of partisan discussion or sophistry but asserted that it produced bad results, destructive of the public interest and disruptive of and destructive of unity. And, fifth, they recognized the existence of dishonorable dishonest politicians who pandered to the lowest interests of the public in order to promote their own self-interest.

IV

Conclusion

A striking contrast in political theories now confronts us. The ancient model presupposed strong bonds of societal friendship with skilled discusses co-operatively devising resolutions for public differences in accord with a common good; whereas the modern-individualistic model assumes a group of self-interested individuals who recognize no common ethical standards trading off individual assets in order to forge an acceptable solution. Yet there are some common assumptions in the two positions despite the manifest differences. For example, both models recognize that some method of resolving disagreements about policy is

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 1378.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 1391-2.
needed. Both presuppose that men even with the best of intentions and even granted widely accepted ethical standards will not always agree about what policy would, in this specific case, best promote the welfare of the community. Secondly, both models exhibit a preference for decentralized government and rationally derived policy decisions. In addition there is the assertion that abstract definitions of majority rule and equality are of very little utility in devising specific policies. There are varying degrees of admission among the writers studied above that political systems operate within the context of social convention or within the limitations, as in America, of religious standards. The last assumption held in common by these theorists is that highly centralized, administrative states require a single co-ordinator. This, it is claimed, results in irrational, rigid decisions potentially destructive of freedom because such a system would be beyond the intellectual capacities of one man. Coordinated, rational planning in the highly centralized, administrative state is a myth.

The most important areas of disagreement may be formulated into the following series of propositions:

1. The standards found in a society's religion and constitutional morality do not provide any operational basis for making specific policy decisions. The only possible standard is individual self-interest;

2. It is possible to formulate a political model in which no general ethics are posited since there are no useful common standards applicable to policy decisions;

3. Decisions and values have to be created by politicians in a negotiated trade;

4. Co-operative discussion is not the preferred method of reaching decisions; and

5. Co-operative discussion within the context of a society in which agreement about some fundamental ethics exists cannot co-exist with either decentralized or free government

A fundamental axiom of the co-operative-ancient position is that the primary obligation of the politician is the pursuit of the common interest. To say that most men are motivated only by the desire to secure power, money and prestige may be tantamount to asserting that, from another moral perspective, all politicians are evil. This pessimistic assumption would preclude the possibility of any statesmen providing virtuous leadership for a society. The classical view that civic virtue derives from dedication to the common good, that disinterested service to
the community is noble and statesman-like, and that some men are capable of self-sacrifice, hence, political virtue seems a better position.

In addition, excessive promotion of self-interest undermines unity and retards the process of reaching decisions. Aristotle insists that promotion of individualistic interests destroys societal dispersion of friendship. The totally self-interested public man would become bogged down in endless negotiations to construct a winning coalition in the assembly or cabinet. One envisions much time wasted, endless delays and stalemates, and insufficient agreement to expedite the public business. After all, why should I compromise or trade away any portion of my own individual self-interest in order to further co-operation and advancement of public policy? Stalemate would result because it is difficult to imagine a situation in which a continuous series of decisions could be mutually beneficial to the perceived self-interests of the individuals participating in the bargains.

Turning to the second area of disagreement, the projection of an operational governmental model in which no general standards exist, the pressing question is: Could any political system work in which there are no ethical criteria except economic or individual self-interest? Perhaps such a system might function, but not, in my estimation, without some application of force because there would not be sufficient voluntary support for its use in the community. Why, for example, should I, John Doe, be obligated to support and pay for X policy made by a group of self-interested administrators in order to promote their self-interests? What standards would be utilized in reaching a prior agreement about how to make decisions, and how would one preclude endless debate over how things are going to be decided in a particular case. If politicians are to discuss endlessly and to make bargains or trades promoting their self-interest and in the process to create "ethical standards," then it appears to me that the model government would grind to a halt.

Another problem with the "no general standards" model concerns the ethical basis for majority rule as a decision-making device in elections, a legislature or an administrative bureau. For how can one remain a unique person with radically individualistic interests and really different ethical principles, and also simultaneously be a part of a majority committed to obey the laws of the land? Surely paralysis would again result simply because (especially where the rule of unanimity is applied as the only logical solution to the above dilemma) few or no decisions supported by a majority could ever be made.

In addition, public discussion in a legislature or cabinet may be an essentially different process from that involved in making economic deals
in which the victory goes to the strongest coalition of selfish interests. Many public policy issues might involve problems that do not relate to "interest," a concept which is rather ill-defined and ambiguous. The discussion process as prescribed by Plato and Aristotle involving men thinking together in order to come up with adequate answers to pressing public problems is the alternative which leaves room for the possibility of decisions based upon pursuit of the common good or justice. All might be said to have an equal stake in working closely and co-operatively together in an atmosphere of friendship in an effort to discover the best possible solutions. This model requires some leaders of intellectual and moral stature who assist in the application and explication of the communities appropriate moral standards. In other words, the moral rubric thou shalt not steal is not automatically self-enforcing nor is it a simple matter to apply in a criminal legal code for a complex industrialized society. But, what modern society could continue to function without an elaborate mechanism enforcing the simple maxim?

The third proposition in dispute raises serious problems for a democratic society. The ancient-communalist accepted the idea of the godlike lawgiver, a Solon or Moses, who formulated their primary moral laws. Hence is brought into question the role of the politician as the creator of values. Two points are at stake: the extent of participation by other societal members in devising general mores or ethics if the community is to be democratic and decentaralized; and the specific problem of relegating the function of value creation to politicians. It would appear that the modern-individualistic model blurs the distinctions between the philosopher-scholar, the churchman-ethicist and the statesman-politician. Too great a responsibility is placed upon the average politician when one asks him to create values by means of deals in the process of trying to work out suitable compromises for the polis. Moreover, ethical standards or rules of some sort may be needed at all stages of the policy formulation process and may well be a prerequisite for peaceful mutual negotiations.

Paradoxically, there is a recognition of the need for a statement of ethical standards to guide the politician's specific policy formulations. In a democratic society these rules should emerge from the hearts of the people, from the souls of those with religious convictions, and from the minds of the philosophers. Surely the politician should be in the business of performing the complex task of taking these standards and demands and formulating the specific details of public policy, of suggesting means, not ends, as Aristotle suggests. If the politicians create values and attempt to impose policies upon a community in which no concen-
sus about their validity exists, then coercion might be required to enforce these laws.

The merits of co-operative discussion are legion. It holds forth the possibility of reducing violent and hateful, interpersonal exchanges about controversial ideals and policies. Indeed, if agreement cannot be reached without provoking excessive anger, one would assume that the wise political decision is to stop pressing that issue, and not take any action until peaceful, rational discussion becomes possible. I would urge the utilitarian consideration that one should not waste time discussing policies that will be violently opposed or received very little support. Co-operative discussion does not create paralysis, irrationality, abstractness; rather it may clear the way for a more realistic estimation of the possible within the limitations imposed in the given context and promote peaceful, friendly, serious consideration of what constitutes good public policy. Disunity and division might be reduced, and persuasion given more chance to prevail over coercion, threat or force. The role of the politician might be reduced to formulating means to achieve agreed upon ends, leaving the realm of ethics to the philosopher, the theorist, the humanist and the churchman. Intelligent public policy might then be devised by politicians, nay statesmen.

And fifth, the assumption that co-operative discussion requires a centralized state needs to be challenged. Is there not an alternative which might prove to be more desirable than either the radical individualistic or the rigidly collectivistic models? Quite clearly the closed, compact communities of ancient Greece are a thing of the past. The Puritan effort to create Christian commonwealths in a new land floundered upon the rocks of religious discord and pluralism. Yet the medieval Christian community was highly localistic, and the Greek city-state was decentralized. Aristotle in the *Politics* presents examples of a variety of small systems. In the pre-modern era there was a plethora of decentralized systems, parochial, viable, local communities. Surely, members of a strong, local community who are wrestling with disputed matters of public policy have a better possibility of reaching a solution acceptable to the majority of citizens than does a central administrator attempting the impossible task of formulating a uniform policy for a society full of divergent interests and views. The co-operative discussion process should work best in a decentralized system where some agreement concerning the common interest still exists. To the contrary one wonders if any serious discussion is possible in or promoted by highly centralized governments in large countries? The conclusion is reached that co-operative discus-
sion and viable concepts of the general interest are most likely to exist in a decentralized system and, therefore, this model does not correspond with a centralized, administrative governmental system.

And last, we reconsider the point with which this essay began, the correlation between democracy and discussion. At issue is what kind of discussion process most closely corresponds with a democratic decision-making process. It has been assumed that there is an inter-relationship between the way decisions are reached and reasonable, democratic government. Unfortunately democratic theories which emphasize majority rule as its typical characteristic tend to end up talking about numbers and counting. The assumption follows that x is the democratic decision simply because more or at least fifty percent plus one of the participants support it. In the last analysis this type of majority rule is reduced to the claim one is obligated to support the rules of the majority because there are more of them and they are stronger than we are. The majority is right because it is more numerous. Both the partisan-individualistic and ancient-communalistic models are an essentially different approach to democratic theory. They stress the importance of making decisions by peaceful means in which decisions are authorized because they result from a process which is rational. The merit of the individualistic model is that it points to a calculated effort to play off considerations of economic and individual self-interest in a bargaining process. The ancient-communalistic model emphasizes adjusting different opinions about what policy best promotes the common interest. The point these theorists make is that by means of protracted fruitful consultations about alternative ideas, the majority has been convinced that their preferences best correspond with a public good. Therefore, in a situation where disagreements arise over choices, all are obligated to support the decision of the majority because more of them think that this policy is for the good of all.