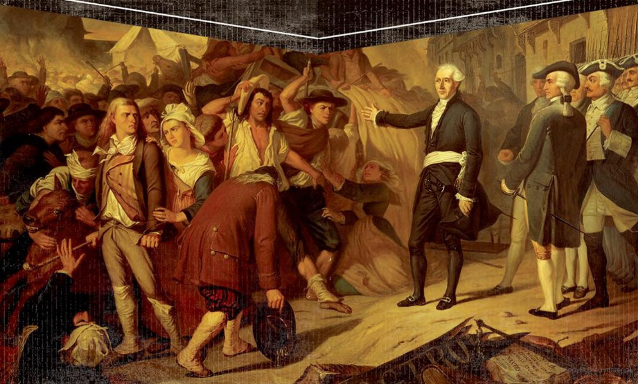
JAMES T. KLOPPENBERG

TOWARD DEMOCRACY

THE STRUGGLE FOR SELF-RULE IN EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN THOUGHT



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The Struggle for Self-Rule in European and American Thought

JAMES T. KLOPPENBERG

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PREFACE

THIS BOOK IS the result of a decision made twenty years ago. I had written a book about the intellectual revolution that lay behind the emergence of the liberal capitalist welfare states of our own day: *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (Oxford, 1986). That book sought to explain why thinkers who rejected revolutionary socialism and laissez-faire liberalism turned toward more moderate approaches to political reform, which in turn fell out of favor in the wake of World War I. After the catastrophic interval of 1914–45, revised versions of social democracy and progressivism emerged to define North Atlantic politics for the half century following World War II. After the publication of *Uncertain Victory*, I spent a decade trying to decide whether to follow that story forward to the present or back toward the beginnings of democracy. I wrote articles on American thought in the late eighteenth century, on Tocqueville's visit to the United States in the 1830s, and on mid- to late-twentieth-century European and American politics and ideas, which came together in my book *The Virtues of Liberalism* (Oxford, 1998).

Still trying to understand why the liberal democratic welfare states of the present had taken such different shapes, and why they failed to address the persistent problems of inequality and injustice, I decided to plunge into the deeper past. Although I thought at first that this book would focus on the North Atlantic in the nineteenth century, I found myself drawn further back. The explanation for the different outcomes of eighteenth-century democratic revolutions, I came to believe, lay in the wars of religion ignited by the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, the dynamics and consequences of which could be understood only with reference to religious as well as political developments rooted in Athens, Jerusalem, and Rome. I became convinced

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that the effects of those earlier struggles were still reverberating in the twenty-first century. If the story told in this book begins earlier than I expected twenty years ago, its significance extends to our own day even more clearly than I imagined.

I have not changed my mind about the argument advanced in *Uncertain Victory* concerning the 1870–1920 period, nor do I think the struggles against dogma and for democratic inquiry and experimentation initiated during those years have been completed. It is certainly true that we have inherited the attempts of social democrats and progressives a century ago to extend the meaning of democracy from the political to the social and economic spheres. It is equally true, however, and less often acknowledged, that we have inherited the results of the unsuccessful attempts made in the nineteenth century to end regimes of economic, racial, and ethnic inequality, and the exclusion from power of women by men. Those forms of hierarchy, descended from ancient assumptions, hardened into distinct systems of white male supremacy on both sides of the Atlantic even as forms of self-rule were taking shape during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Those assumptions and hierarchies continue to inflect European and American cultures today. This book is a study of the aspirations and achievements of thinkers who championed democracy through the end of the nineteenth century, the obstacles they faced, the conflicts they failed to resolve, and the unanticipated consequences of their struggle.

Completing a book of this magnitude takes a lot of time and a lot of help. I am happy to acknowledge the support of fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies, the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. I also want to thank the Nominating Committee for the Pitt Professorship, and the Fellows of Jesus College, University of Cambridge, for a memorable year in 2008–9; the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, for an equally memorable spring in 2013; and, at Harvard, the assistance of the Cabot Fellowship, the Center for American Political Studies, the Center for European Studies, the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, the Mahindra Humanities Center, and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study.

I am grateful to those who invited me to present my ideas about democracy, and those who discussed the topic with me, at the following colleges and universities: Brandeis, Cambridge, Catholic, Colby, Columbia, CUNY Graduate Center, Dartmouth, Denison, Dresden, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Free University of Berlin, Institut d'Etudes Politiques (Sciences Po) in Paris, London (University College), Northwestern, Notre

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Dame, Nottingham, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Oxford, Rennes, Sheffield, Stanford, Sussex, Tokyo, Toronto, Turin, Vienna, Virginia, Washington University (St. Louis), and Yale; and also the Phillips Andover Academy, the Roxbury Latin School, St. Mark's School, the National Humanities Center in North Carolina, and the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC. Over the years I have relied on the splendid research staffs and extraordinary collections of libraries at Harvard, Cambridge, and Oxford, the American Antiquarian Society, the Boston Public Library, the British Library, the French National Archives, the French National Library, the Library of Congress, and the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Working with the staff of Oxford University Press has been a pleasure. The late Sheldon Meyer had confidence I could complete this book when it was still just an idea, and Susan Ferber waited patiently while I labored over a manuscript that kept getting longer. For helping transform that sprawling draft into this book, I am deeply grateful to Tim Bent. He shared my vision of what the book should be, and during the long months we worked on it he showed the intelligence, imagination, persistence, and generosity that all authors dream of finding in their editors. India Cooper, who lived up to her reputation for combining omniscience with meticulous attention to detail, proved that the art of copy editing, one of the most demanding aspects of scholarly production, remains alive. Alyssa O'Connell managed every stage of the intricate process with speed and grace, and Amy Whitmer skillfully guided me through the final stages of production. Niko Pfund reassured me, in moments of uneasiness, that everything was under control. At a time when many publishers are scaling back, urging authors to lower their sights and narrow their focus, it has been most satisfying to work with thoroughgoing professionals and a press committed to producing, according to the highest standards and without cutting any corners, a book of this scale and complexity.

Research and writing require isolation, but a scholar's life depends on communication and conversation. Without the affection and camaraderie of friends outside the study, the solitary days and nights of writing would be stifling rather than exhilarating. I would like to acknowledge first many of the current and former students who have helped with this project, over many years and in many ways, from sharing their ideas and their scholarship to checking notes and reading drafts: Tim Barker, Marco Basile, Mike Bernath, Kenzie Bok, Niko Bowie, Angus Burgin, Lucy Caplan, Tom Coens, Dana Comi, Yonatan Eyal, Jeanne Follansbee, John Gee, Scott Gelber, Katharine Gerbner, Glenda Goodman, Tina Groeger, Matt Hale, Dan Hamilton, Jared Hickman, Ben Irvin, Amy Kittelstrom, Mary Beth Klee, Sam Klug, Alison LaCroix, Ariane Liazos, Jason Maloy, Abbie Modaff, Elizabeth More, Darra Mulderry, Shaun

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It is sobering to realize that this book has taken so long to complete that some of the scholars who guided my thinking about the history of democracy are no longer alive to see it come to fruition: Willi-Paul Adams, Carl Degler, Bill Gienapp, Stanley Hoffmann, Istvan Hont, Mark Kishlansky, Pauline Maier, Marvin Meyers, Michael O'Brien, and Jack Pole.

My deepest and most enduring debts are, as always, to my immediate family. My children, Annie Kloppenberg and Jay Kloppenberg, who grew up with this book, have become fearless creators, whose contributions to art and education have helped me see the many ways in which cultures of democracy can be built. As choreographer, dancer, scholar, and teacher, Annie has deepened the insights of the philosophers William James and John Dewey into the phenomenology of embodied aesthetic experience. Her explorations of collaboration and improvisation, beyond enriching the experiences of dancers and audiences on both sides of the Atlantic, show how the arts can foster democratic sensibilities. By establishing the African School for Excellence, now flourishing in townships near Johannesburg, Jay and his partner, Nonhlanhla Masina, are realizing their dream of expanding access to first-rate secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa. Imaginatively updating visions of democratic education from Dewey to Paulo Freire for the digital age, ASE is preparing students to pursue advanced studies in neighborhoods where few children have had that chance.

Besides reminding me often that Iceland, where her maternal grandparents were born, was the world's first democracy, my wife, Mary Kloppenberg, lived with this book from the beginning. She has devoted forty years of her life to young children and their families. For more than twenty-six years she has served as executive director of the extraordinarily successful early-childhood and after-school programs of the Wellesley Community Children's Center. Those of us lucky enough to work in higher education enjoy abundant respect and rewards for what we do. Those engaged in the far more challenging, and

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far more crucial, work of teaching our youngest children enjoy neither. The responsibilities and the urgency of Mary's work have made it impossible for her to weigh every word of this book, yet her unflagging commitment to the life of the mind, or, to be more precise, to the minds and hearts of young children during the years when scholars tell us the most learning occurs, has inspired my efforts as a teacher, scholar, and citizen. All the dimensions of democracy are encapsulated in the principle that has animated Mary's life and work: all children should have the care and nurturing necessary to enable them to reach their full potential. It is with deep gratitude for her life and her love, and with ever deeper admiration for her devotion to that principle, that I dedicate this book to her.

J. T. K.
Wellesley, Massachusetts
July 2015

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Introduction

The Paradoxes of Democracy

Swept forward by waves of popular passion, democracy has buried all alternatives to become the world's governing ideal. It was not always so. From the ancient world until the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, feelings about government by the people flowed in the opposite direction. "Democracy" was a term of abuse, usually yoked with labels such as "rabble," "herd," or "mob." By the end of the nineteenth century, however, things had changed. Over the course of four centuries, in many parts of the North Atlantic world the idea of self-government, scorned for nearly two millennia, emerged as a widely shared, albeit still controversial, model of government. This book, a history of democracy as it was imagined, understood, and practiced during those centuries, explores the reasons for that transformation and explains why the promise of democracy remains unfulfilled. If democracy gradually remade nations on both sides of the Atlantic, different preexisting cultural and institutional topographies, which lay hidden beneath the surface, helped determine the forms of popular government that emerged. From the early sixteenth through the late nineteenth century, conflicts over the people's proper role repeatedly exploded into war, and the long-term effects of those bloodlettings shaped the history of democracy everywhere.[1]

Democracy arose from violence and has never strayed far from it. Disputes over the form of governance appropriate for church and state, rooted in disagreements over theology and ecclesiology, spawned religious wars that convulsed sixteenth-century Europe. Struggles over questions of legitimate authority and the path to salvation drove many seventeenth-century English dissenters into exile, and those struggles ended in civil war and regicide. After self-government became the ideal of settlers in British North America,

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who declared their independence in 1776 and created the United States, the idea of democracy inspired successive revolutions in France that eventually spread across continental Europe. Changing attitudes toward popular government likewise fueled waves of reform that eventually transformed nineteenth-century Great Britain, though without fundamentally altering the nation's monarchical form of government. Democracy served as the founding ideal of the United States, yet in time rival understandings of what democracy means ignited a civil war that shapes the nation's history to this day.

In central Europe the slow tectonic shift toward self-government was more protracted. Although popular insurgencies, usually propelled by radical religious ideas, broke out as early as the sixteenth century, in the German states no governing political party outside Swiss-influenced Württemberg would dare designate itself "democratic" until 1918. The disputes that raged on both sides of the Atlantic from the early sixteenth century through the end of the nineteenth century, like struggles among competing groups within nations just emerging from long experience under autocracy in our own day, turned on questions as urgent now as they were then: What does democracy mean? How and why has it succeeded, and how and why has it failed?

This book traces the rise of democracy in European and American thought. Some of the thinkers examined here exerted influence only by the words they wrote; others played active parts in political and social life. Although people who did not write books, exercise political power, or possess cultural authority certainly contributed to the history of democracy, this book concentrates on those who wrote pivotal texts and framed arguments that helped change the terms of debate.[2] The history of democracy, in addition to being a story of social movements and political and economic developments, is also a story of ideas in history.[3]

The primary focus of this book is the shaping of democracy in what became the United States of America, but that does not make it an American history. All seventeenth- and almost all eighteenth-century North American thinkers wrote as members of European cultures, and Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams were almost as well known in France as they were in America. Nineteenth-century Americans likewise inherited European ideas and participated actively in transatlantic communities of discourse. Even self-taught Americans such as Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln, whose educations were particularly hard-earned, frequently quoted sources ranging from the Bible and Shakespeare to contemporary European writers, and both were celebrated by reformers across the Atlantic. Most of those who contributed to democratic theory in America or Europe, from the sixteenth century through the nineteenth, thought of themselves as partici-

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pants in a common cultural project. Europeans, from Michel de Montaigne through John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill, paid close attention to the New World. Most American thinkers were familiar with the ideas of John Milton and Algernon Sidney, Montesquieu and Adam Smith, Maximilien Robespierre and Mary Wollstonecraft. This book integrates European and American history to show how American ideas and practices descended from, and diverged from, earlier European, particularly English and French, models. It also shows that the influence of American thought and practice on European ideas about democracy—both negative and positive—was persistent and profound.[4]

Translating from one language or conceptual scheme to another is difficult. I have tried not to turn these thinkers into versions of each other or to find earlier versions of later ideas where they did not exist. Both the word "democracy" and the concept of self-government, however, were widely used from the ancient world onward. The word "democracy" derives from the ancient Greek word for "popular power." The Greeks distinguished the power (*kratos*) of the people (the *demos*) from government by the few (which came to be known as aristocracy) and government by one (monarchy). Just as they thought aristocracy could devolve into oligarchy and monarchy into tyranny, so they understood that rule by the people could dissolve into anarchy. Since its origins, democracy has been a protean idea that has attracted passionate advocates and equally passionate critics. The writers examined in this book read widely, across eras and across traditions. If comparing different cultures is as rewarding as it is challenging, so is studying ideas across a long time span.[5] This book does not trace a single concept of democracy from Periclean Athens to Gilded Age America, Victorian England, and the French Third Republic. Instead it examines the diverse meanings of terms used for multiple purposes, terms such as "democracy," "self-government," and "popular sovereignty," to designate a variety of ideas with contested meanings, not only across time but at every historical moment.

I offer this interpretation not as *the* history of democratic thought but as *a* history of democratic thought. The wide scope of this book means that it cannot be comprehensive. The number of people and events omitted inevitably dwarfs the number included. This book examines in some detail those thinkers who, in my judgment, made the most important contributions to the North Atlantic discourse of democracy through the end of the nineteenth century, many of whom shared an interest in the particular problems of representative democracy. Thinkers who dismissed all forms of democracy as undesirable, or who resisted the very idea of representation as antithetical to democracy, receive less attention here.

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Most wide-ranging studies of democratic theory have been written by scholars of political philosophy who aim to offer a theory as well a history of democracy. While this book draws on that scholarship, it is a work of history that attempts to explain what happened and why. Ideas that are defeated often seem to disappear, but more often they persist, deep beneath the surface, slowly shifting the plates above. Although the discourse of democracy, over time and across cultures, has lacked the consistency or coherence of philosophical systems, a history focusing on ideas must address the flaws and inconsistencies of the arguments deployed by people trying to solve the problems of their day.[6]

This book does not seek to provide a theory of democracy. Nonetheless it emerged from and reflects a conviction that we need to change the way we think about democracy. Both the far left and the far right in Europe and the United States often view the institutions and practices of representative democracy as inadequate. For that reason, from the perspective of such critics, voting in elections and participating in mainstream public debate can be dismissed as a pale and shallow substitute for the more robust practices of direct democracy, which requires the active participation of citizens that is often held out as the defining feature of genuine self-government. That conviction, usually framed by romantic evocations of brief, evanescent moments of intense popular engagement such as those of 1789, 1848, or 1968, lacks historical foundation and rests on a misunderstanding of representative democracy.

Democracy has been—and remains—an ethical ideal rather than merely a set of institutions. It requires the willingness to allow differences to persist, a commitment to toleration that has long dissatisfied idealists. When you know the Truth, reasoning with your opponents or putting questions to a vote makes no sense. Democracy requires even those most sure of themselves to persuade a public often blind to what true believers find self-evident. For that reason democracy has always frustrated utopians. This book explains how and why champions of democracy in Europe and America, who understood that democracy is never merely a matter of institutional design, failed to achieve the results they sought. Though their ideals extended beyond voting to concerns with justice, they did not dismiss the casting of ballots or the reliance on representatives. To the contrary, almost all of them believed that representative democracy could help citizens develop the broadened sensibility of mutuality, or reciprocity, that democracy requires, and they believed that representatives, through deliberation, can identify the common good.

For the men and women examined in this book, voting was a necessary but not sufficient condition of democracy, just as self-government meant

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something more than a set of institutional arrangements. Of course they realized that such institutions, including constitutional government securing the integrity of the law, majority rule, and popular selection of those responsible for the work of government, are indispensable. The rise of democracy in the modern North Atlantic world, however, has had a broader cultural significance, one that can best be understood by examining the ideas of popular sovereignty, autonomy, and equality that lie at the center of this inquiry. Rather than thinking of democracy exclusively in terms of political—or even economic or social—arrangements, we should think of it as an ethical ideal. Modern democracy is rooted in the shared assumption that all citizens should have the capacity to shape their own lives within boundaries established by the standards and traditions of their communities, and that all citizens should be able to participate equally in shaping those standards and revising those traditions.

In the last century the meaning of democracy has gradually expanded, especially in Europe but also in the United States, from the political to the economic and social spheres. The category of citizenship has grown from a restricted group of white male property holders, usually of a certain religious affiliation, to include all adults regardless of race, gender, class, or religion. Along with those expansions of democracy and citizenship, however, and perhaps partly—and painfully—as a consequence of them, the ethical dimensions of democratic culture have become less and less evident in the last century. The thinkers who wrote most incisively about democracy as it took shape reveal why contemporary democracies fall so short of their promise. Nonetheless, despite widespread agreement about the desirability of democracy now, it would be antihistorical to assert the adequacy of a single understanding of what democracy has meant, not only across the time span of several centuries but also within individual nations. Disagreements about democracy constitute its history.

This book is not only a description of the experience of multiple nations with democracy; it is also an argument about the changing meanings of democracy, as well as the political, social, and economic conditions that have made it possible and necessary. Distinctive national traditions of popular government persist, and appreciating their roots and their continuity as well as signaling common processes of transformation is crucial. Rather than perpetuating debates about "American exceptionalism," this book seeks to contribute to the rise of a post-exceptionalist sensibility that acknowledges the uniqueness of each national history, not only American, British, and French but also Dutch, Swiss, and German, even though common threads justify placing these cultures in a single braided narrative. Especially searing

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events—notably the wars of religion, regicides in England and France, the European revolutions of 1848, and the United States Civil War—have shaped cultural understandings by imprinting particular experiences in collective memory. Such formative events impose frameworks through which cultures interpret what happened to themselves and to others, another reason why a general concept of democracy cannot be constructed independent of the particular historical experiences that filter popular memories, anxieties, and aspirations.[7]

At the heart of debates about democracy are three contested principles, popular sovereignty, autonomy, and equality; and three related, but less visible, underlying premises, deliberation, pluralism, and reciprocity. The persistent struggles over these principles and premises help explain the tangled history of democracy in practice as well as theory. This book also explores two underappreciated aspects of North Atlantic democracy, its religious origins and its ethical dimensions, which have profoundly influenced its development. Again, there is no single, essential, unchanging idea of democracy; its meanings have changed over time and been debated at every moment. These principles and premises are not meant to provide a transhistorical standard against which thinkers and institutions should be measured but only a conceptual framework for the historical analysis that follows.

To start with the first of the three principles, popular sovereignty holds that the will of the people is the sole source of legitimate authority. Although apparently unambiguous, its precise meaning has always been the central issue in debates about democracy. Champions of monarchical or aristocratic rather than strictly popular government have insisted that the people can legitimately choose to—and should—place themselves under the authority of a single person or a group of qualified individuals. Even partisans of democracy have expressed misgivings about the people's capacity to exercise judgment. Thomas Jefferson, by popular reckoning among the most passionately democratic of eighteenth-century thinkers, became increasingly ambivalent about those who considered him their champion. In a letter written in 1820, the seventy-seven-year-old Jefferson identified this perennial problem: "I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves," he wrote in an apparently unqualified endorsement of popular rule. "If we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to enlighten their discretion."[8] Despite his genuine preference for democracy over monarchy or aristocracy, Jefferson did not identify the "we" charged with enlightening the people's discretion or explain what justification "we" have for presuming to instruct them. That problem has dogged even the

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most ardent champions of democracy, who have been forced by abundant evidence to admit, as Jefferson himself did in the wake of the French Revolution, that the people are capable of horrible excesses. Ever since Plato's Socrates likened statesmen to doctors and politicians to chefs—the former prescribe what is good for you even if it tastes terrible, the latter merely ask what tastes good—political thinkers have acknowledged the need to "enlighten" the people or to train (or restrain) their appetites. The principle of popular sovereignty itself, which assumes that the people are the source of authority and possess the potential to exercise good judgment, has been understood to be consistent with multiple forms of government.

Another perennial complication in the principle of popular sovereignty is the difference between representation and participation. Many ancient Greeks considered representation inimical to democracy; Athens relied on sortition, or lottery, to determine many positions of civic authority. But skeptics then and ever since have contended that chance as often empowers the reckless and foolish as the prudent and wise. In part to counter that concern, the practice of representative democracy, hardly unknown to the Greeks and further developed in the Roman republic, reemerged in late-medieval Europe. Elections appeared to offer a means of coping with the excesses of popular passion and the problem of scale, which made meetings of all citizens impractical in any political unit larger than a village. With the decline of hierarchy and the spread of literacy beginning in the sixteenth century, however, assumptions about citizens' different capacities, assumptions often invoked to justify representation rather than participation, again came under fire. That tension between direct and representative democracy, originating in the ancient world, has persisted into the present. As interest in democracy rose in the postmedieval world, its partisans as well as its critics argued that the principle of popular sovereignty must be balanced against other values such as individual rights, the common good, and stability, considerations that might serve as brakes on the people's sometimes unenlightened discretion. Although locating absolute, unquestionable authority in any single person or institution other than the people is anathema to democracy, examples of mob violence prompted uncomfortable realizations that some alternative source of legitimate authority, or some institutional check or legal constraint, must be available in practice to counter popular passions when they spin out of control.

Autonomy is the second principle of democracy. One of the principal arguments of this study is the centrality of the idea of autonomy in contrast to the impoverished conceptions of freedom that dominate contemporary scholarly and popular debate. The etymological roots of "autonomy" stretch

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back to the Greek words for "self" and "rule" or "law." "Autonomy" thus means self-rule. An autonomous individual exercises control over his or her own life by developing a self that is sufficiently mature to make decisions according to rules or laws chosen for good reasons. Autonomous individuals are in control of themselves, which means first that they are sovereign masters of their wills and second that they are not dependent on the wills (or whims) of others. Recent political theorists who have distinguished between "positive" and "negative" freedom, between the freedom to do something and the freedom from constraint, depart from the discourse of earlier democratic theorists, who understood that autonomy means self-rule in *both* the positive and negative senses: it requires a self both psychologically and ethically, as well as economically and socially, capable of deliberate action; and it requires the absence of control over individuals by other individuals and by the state. Autonomy has meaning only if individuals are understood as beings who act on the basis of consciously chosen goals developed in the framework of community standards and traditions. Thus in democratic discourse the idea of autonomy, like that of popular sovereignty, must be balanced against other ideas, in this case the dual awareness that constraints circumscribe individual choices and that the choices of the mature self must be weighed against the demands of the community.[9]

Equality is the third contested principle of democracy. The conflict arises not only from the familiar opposition between the values of equality and individual autonomy but also from the inescapable tensions within the concept of equality itself. The familiar distinction between equality of opportunity and equality of result again obscures the deeper problem, because equal opportunity is not possible in conditions of extreme inequality. There is nevertheless an inevitable contradiction between the principle of equality and the democratic commitment to majority rule. Imagine a simple community with three voters. Two of them decide that the third should become their slave, and they justify their decision by the principle of majority rule. When the third invokes the principles of autonomy and equality in self-defense—as oppressed minorities have often done, sometimes successfully—that strategy counterposes principles equally central to democracy to the principle of majority rule.

Although that example seems to suggest that an irreconcilable contradiction exists between different democratic ideals, it indicates only that the concepts of popular sovereignty, autonomy, and equality are mutually constitutive; they have no meaning except in relation to each other. The discourse of democracy, like the institutional frameworks of different democratic cultures, is complex and multilayered. It requires the careful weighing of dif-

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ferent values rather than the passionate defense of one alone. As its emergence over the centuries shows, democracy is best understood as a way of life, not simply a set of political institutions. The internal tensions between the principle of popular sovereignty and the principles of autonomy and equality make the notion of a smooth-running, conflict-free democracy a contradiction in terms; history provides no examples of a placid democracy. Inherent in democracy, even when conceived of as an ethical ideal and a way of life, are the inevitable disagreements, and the victories, defeats, and compromises, that are inseparable from the commitment to allowing people to pursue their own ideals and refusing to specify in advance which of their different, and perhaps even incompatible, conceptions will triumph.

That commitment itself rests on three distinct premises that, as a result of the work done by the thinkers examined in this book, can now be seen to lie beneath modern democracy. Emerging from the wars of religion and contested for several centuries, these premises had become, by the end of the nineteenth century, the underlying pillars on which modern North Atlantic democracy stands. The first is necessity of deliberation. We cannot know, or impose on all persons, a fixed and unitary conception of the truth. In a democracy provisional truths emerge from the process of free inquiry, from the verification of truth claims in experience, and from democratic deliberation understood as the means of provisionally resolving remaining disputes. The English verb "deliberate" derives from the Latin *deliberare*, meaning to weigh well, to consider; that activity lies at the heart of democratic culture. Only when all citizens broaden their perspectives sufficiently to weigh well, or to consider seriously, the views of others who disagree with them is democratic deliberation possible. The mere tallying of individual desires, the elevation of unexamined and indefensible personal preferences to the level of privileged rights, although currently a common understanding of the meaning of democracy, is antithetical to this venerable conception of democracy as an ethical project necessarily concerned with the constitution of selfhood through dialogue with other persons engaged in the same process.

Democratic deliberation of this sort, despite its roots in classical, Christian, and Enlightenment thought, does not impose a certain form of reasoning or conversation to the exclusion of others. Instead the entire question of what is to constitute democratic deliberation must itself be subject to deliberation. That may seem to initiate an infinite regression but instead merely indicates that the procedures for interaction, as well as the outcome of that interaction, must themselves be considered provisional and subject to acceptance by the consent of those who participate in the conversation. The expansion of the relevant community is part of the democratic dynamic that has been developing

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since the revaluations of human capacity beginning with the Renaissance, maturing in the Reformation, and continuing into the present; challenging forms of argument preferred by those in power is a long-standing tradition that women and minorities have continued in recent decades by questioning established notions of reason, logic, and evidence. Those engaged in democratic discourse have long debated the role of rhetoric in shaping and enabling public debate. Does oratory—grand or simple—help citizens see the common good and embrace it, or does it distort their vision and obscure their understanding? In all conversations, eloquence, authority, shrewdness, and persuasiveness always intrude. A chasm falls between the ideal of deliberation—weighing well—and the reality of public debate.[10]

The second premise is that democracy does not specify once and for all, or impose on all persons, a fixed, unitary conception of the good life more specific or substantive than its commitments to popular sovereignty, autonomy, and equality. Achieving the shared understanding that democracy is necessarily both liberal and pluralistic was the work of the thinkers examined in this book, thinkers active in the era stretching from the sixteenth-century wars of religion to the end of the nineteenth century. That shared understanding was particularly difficult to establish because deeply held convictions about how life should be lived, usually but not exclusively grounded in religious belief, inspired so many of those who advanced the cause of democracy.

The third premise of modern democracy engaged by these figures, the ethic of reciprocity, provides the rationale for treating all persons with respect and weighing well their aspirations and their ways of looking at the world. This principle, which extends the category of those deserving consideration beyond the small body of citizens in ancient Greece and Rome or God's chosen people to embrace all humanity, originated in early Christianity. Absent commitments to deliberation, pluralism, and reciprocity, the call for popular rule can be a rationale for cruelty: as already noted, any group of three can yield a majority of two committed to enslaving the other one. Grounded on those premises, however, the democratic commitment to the principles of popular sovereignty, autonomy, and equality can translate into something more than a set of institutions and procedures, a way of life devoted to securing for all citizens autonomy and the equal chance to participate in shaping the institutions that affect their lives. This study traces the historical development of these interwoven threads in the emergence and transformation of democracy on both sides of the North Atlantic.

Those who contributed to the creation of modern European and American democratic regimes did not profess identical religious doctrines or ethical ideals, but the vast majority claimed to embrace the Judeo-Christian maxim

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of the sanctity of individual life. They also shared ethical assumptions about the superiority of some ways of life to others. We have inherited the myriad democratic procedures they put in place and their languages of popular sovereignty, autonomy, and equality—with their multiple layers of meaning. Perhaps because many people today have lost confidence in the universality of the religious ideas that originally infused democratic discourse, we tend to overlook the democratic ethic of reciprocity taken for granted by earlier generations, which leaves us with a flattened appreciation of the meaning and potential of democratic life. The significance for democracy of the transformation of North Atlantic cultures from a shared Judeo-Christian worldview to a more fragmented outlook is another principal question posed by this study.

It is clear that ideas about value judgments have changed dramatically. Greek and Roman philosophers generally conceived of reason as integral to ethical and political judgment. Early Christian thinkers insisted on unifying thought and action under the all-embracing command to love one another. By contrast, many social scientists in recent decades have tended to separate the category of rational thought, modeled now on supposedly neutral scientific and technical reasoning oriented toward maximizing individual utility, from the realms of faith, emotion, or taste, which are lumped together as "value questions" on which individuals need not, and cannot be expected to, agree. If greater tolerance for diversity has been gained in that translation, an idea of the good life as something shared by members of a community has been lost.

Looming ominously in the background of modern democratic discourse is the experience of religious warfare sparked by the Protestant Reformation, which destroyed the illusion of unity upheld in medieval Christendom. All sides were guilty of murderous excesses. In the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre of 1572, hundreds of French Protestants were rounded up and murdered. When Roman Catholic monasteries in England and northern Europe were sacked, thriving communities of devout persons were destroyed along with the corrupt hypocrites who were the original targets. In orgies of violence such as the sack of Magdeburg in 1630–31, rampaging soldiers robbed and butchered most of the townspeople who resisted them. Such abominations left a legacy of fear, suspicion, and hatred; not only were people willing to die for their beliefs, they were willing to kill for them. The early-modern fear of fanaticism was rooted not in irrational fantasies of what might happen if popular passions were unleashed but instead in the horrible reality of towns torched and innocents slaughtered. Apprehensions provoked by democratic revolutions in Europe and North America, both successful and unsuccessful,

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must be understood in the context of profound cultural anxieties concerning the balance between the desirability of empowering the people and the very real dangers of zealotry.

Historians and philosophers have often celebrated or pilloried early-modern advocates of popular rule by exaggerating particular dimensions of their thought and then interpreting their efforts through lenses provided by later developments that those historical figures could not have anticipated; a few notable examples include Roger Williams and John Milton, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and James Madison, and Mary Wollstonecraft and Frederick Douglass. This study seeks to present thinkers' ideas from their own perspectives. Many of the most influential contributors to democratic discourse from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries sought religious freedom not because they did not value faith but because they abhorred the consequences of religious warfare. They sought to enshrine reason not because they devalued emotion but because they recognized and abhorred the cruelty grounded in and justified by superstition and tradition. They sought economic freedom not because they did not value fairness and equality but because they recognized and abhorred the oppressiveness and stultifying effects of premarket economies and feudal arrangements confining individuals to particular social strata and worlds of work. They sought political rights for individuals not because they did not value community or solidarity but because they recognized and abhorred the consequences of absolutism. Finally, many of them preferred mixed government or representative democracy over direct democracy not because they did not value the ideals of popular sovereignty, autonomy, and equality but because they deplored the violent excesses displayed first in the wars of religion, then in the civil wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, later in the French Revolution and the nineteenth-century revolutions it inspired, and finally in and after the United States Civil War. They believed that if the crucial principle of popular sovereignty were established as the source of constitutional law, and if citizens learned from the experience of democratic political activity to embrace the principle of reciprocity, then the people could exercise responsible control of their culture and find the most effective means to achieve their goals in changing circumstances.

Those circumstances did indeed change in the aftermath of the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century, but not in ways that the architects of those revolutions anticipated. As a result, the ideas and strategies of democratic thinkers and activists changed as well. The new freedoms secured for individuals unleashed forms of economic and political activity that dramatically transformed the world of restrictive feudal arrangements and aristo-

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cratic privileges. The new world of industrial capitalism and popular government, although the latter was even more severely restricted in Europe than in the United States until the end of the nineteenth century, gradually eroded inherited customs. In their place came more fluid social arrangements and rapidly changing forms of production and exchange. In the process a new set of problems developed, but these problems represented the unanticipated consequence of change, not the intended result. The social transformations set in motion by eighteenth-century revolutionaries' emphasis on individual freedom ended up making that freedom an end in itself rather than a means toward the end of an autonomous life of moral and civic virtue. A world dominated by instrumental reasoning and the scramble for economic success by any means was not the world that eighteenth-century champions of popular government sought.

Responding to the possibilities available thanks to the logic of democracy, nineteenth-century reformers aimed to address these new forms of dependency and inequality by widening the electorate and expanding the responsibilities of government. Their hope was to resolve the tension between the expressive individualism of liberated citizens and their yearnings for social solidarity and national community. Revolutions, wars of national unification, and the United States Civil War yielded different solutions to this problem. All of them reflected particular cultural and religious traditions. Because all of them built on the fissures of earlier wars that had shattered the ethic of reciprocity, all proved unstable. Toward the end of the nineteenth century new modes of democratic thinking and a new set of democratic reforms emerged, incorporating greater sensitivity to the problems of poverty, the domination of women by men, and the poisonous effects of racism, although those problems too persisted despite reformers' efforts. Many of these problems can be traced to the permanent scars left by the violence of earlier civil wars. In the case of the most recent of those cataclysms, the United States Civil War, those scars have not yet healed after a century and a half.

Framed by these events, the history of democratic theory and practice in modern Europe and America is a story of unforeseen and unintended consequences. Those who envisioned and helped implement democratic reforms did not succeed in securing the autonomy and equality they sought. Instead the tragic irony of democracy—for it is nothing less than that—has been the recurrent creation of social and political arrangements that, although often initially appearing to mirror popular desires, ended up either freeing previously repressed impulses that undermined democracy or generating other pressures that produced new and unanticipated forms of dependency and hierarchy. Eighteenth-century revolutions, the American and particularly the

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French, ushered in new forms of oppression that resulted from what appeared to be democratic reformers' most successful achievements. The most conspicuous failures of modern democracy reflect neither villainy nor conspiracy, nor even shortsightedness or simple naiveté, but instead the tragic irony of democratic virtues.[11]

As this book attempts to show, we cannot understand the rise and consolidation of democratic institutions, or the successes and failures of democratic reformers, on either side of the Atlantic unless we look beyond our own contemporary categories of politics and economics, important as they are, and beyond the categories of conservative and radical, liberal and republican, capitalist and socialist, important as they have been, to see how such ideas have been changed and amalgamated in the historical discourse of democracy. From the early seventeenth century through the end of the nineteenth century, democracy was an ethical ideal as much as it was a political or economic ideal, and we cannot understand the historical development of American or European cultures without focusing on the moral and religious dimensions of the struggles that have given us the world we inhabit. This book shows how and why American and European champions of democracy understood the potentially democratic nature of state power, and how and why they conceived of autonomy within the context of equality and mutuality, in an effort to restore the contingency of outcomes to our historical imagination.[12]

Even if the history of democracy has not culminated in triumph, it does possess a certain directionality. Setbacks have been plentiful, yet it would be folly to deny that the political institutions in place in the North Atlantic West are more democratic in the twenty-first century than in the sixteenth. Illuminating the ways in which, and the reasons why, inherited ideas and existing structures gave way to new ways of thinking and new social practices, including the wider acceptance of the principles and premises of democracy, remains crucial. The history of democracy has never been unilinear, nor its outcome foreordained. Instead it has been a messy process with paradoxical gains and losses, unexpected advances and retreats, happening simultaneously in different places and often in different parts of a single nation.[13]

Ideas are weapons, instruments, tools used in argument, and they cannot be understood in the abstract, without reference to the particular purposes of those who employed them in any text, whether a philosophical treatise or a political tract. Meanings, particularly for those texts that have acquired a normative significance for cultures over time, are elusive and protean. To a certain degree, the meanings intended by historical writers and speakers, and those understood by historical readers and listeners, are lost to us, because we inherit knowledge and understandings through which we inevitably filter all

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the texts we encounter. Even though historians should acknowledge the obstacles that stand in our way, we can strive for understandings as close to the meanings intended by those whom we study as we can achieve. Comparative historical studies are complicated by the fact that meanings change over time and across languages, and as a result of later interpretations, yet meanings remain at least sufficiently stable to enable what we call communication.[14] This study resurrects the importance of ethical and religious ideas in democratic discourse because our contemporary scholarly and popular emphasis on economic efficiency and self-interested political behavior blinds us to the equally important role played by other considerations in the history of democracy.[15]

Recovering the ethical dimensions of earlier democratic discourse requires examining familiar figures in political theory as well as contributors of important ideas long marginalized in standard accounts. Eighteenth-century feminists, including Wollstonecraft in England, Judith Sargent Murray in America, and Olympe de Gouges in France, drew from their dissatisfaction with the constraints imposed by sexual stereotyping a critique of the often invisible oppression operating in male-dominated cultures. Feminists ever since have transformed democratic discourse, particularly with respect to the relations between logic and emotion in the exercise of reason, and between individuals and community in the exercise of rights. They have pointed out that even autonomous selves inevitably experience dependency at the beginning and end of their lives, an awkward and unsettling challenge to those who conceive of freedom simply as the absence of constraint. Such arguments can hardly be considered peripheral or supplementary to a supposed mainstream of cultural debate.

Likewise insights of racial minorities place mainstream Western ideas of selfhood and social responsibility in a different light. Those barred from power because of race or ethnicity illuminate the problematical nature of attempts to incorporate diversity within any culture premised on assumptions about fundamental commonality—most notably, the willingness to abide by the will of the majority—that must underlie democratic institutions. The scope of democratic citizenship expanded during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries largely due to changing conceptions of the criteria appropriate for determining who should take part in the decision-making process. Few women and members of racial minorities were allowed to participate formally in the public debates that eventually enlarged the category of citizenship to include women and nonwhites. But the ideas of thinkers such as Douglass had explosive significance in shaping modern democratic thought and culture; like the ideas of feminists, such insights do not simply

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add another dimension to our thinking about democracy in conditions of ethnic diversity, they transform it.[16]

As noted, religious affiliation has been until recently one of the defining dimensions of personal identity for almost all members of North Atlantic cultures. Given the centrality of obedience to authority in such religious traditions, as well as the importance of concepts such as sin, evil, and repentance, and given the tendency of many secular scholars to associate religious faith with superstition, the contributions of religious communities to democratic theory and practice are often minimized. But understanding sixteenth-century Protestant challenges to the papacy, seventeenth-century Puritan challenges to royal authority, the mobilization of colonial American resentments against Britain, the violent spasms of the French Revolution, the nineteenth-century waves of social protest, and the fervor of both sides in the United States Civil War—to cite just a few of the more obvious examples—requires attending to popular religious ideals and to the writings of religious leaders, who often inspired democratic reform movements. Illuminating the vexed relation between traditional religious doctrines and democratic principles is among the main goals of this study. Many partisans of democracy, from unconventionally Christian thinkers such as John Locke and John Adams to champions of the rights of women such as Wollstonecraft and abolitionists such as Douglass, drew inspiration from their religious faith.[17]

There are multiple reasons for taking seriously the role of religion in modern democratic discourse. Historically it is undeniable that the source of the animating ideals of modern democratic movements in the Atlantic world has been the Christian principle of *agape*, selfless love for all humans because all are created in God's image, which lies beneath the democratic ethic of reciprocity. Astute critics from Erasmus through Friedrich Nietzsche to Jürgen Habermas have observed that the Christian ideas of humility, mercy, forgiveness, and equal respect for other persons form the backdrop against which modern concepts of autonomy and equality emerged, and they remain a crucial part of the cultural inheritance of North Atlantic democratic cultures.[18] Our own ideas and ideals, our own analytical tools and our most cherished values, have emerged through the historical process that we study. For that reason historians should treat the past we study with the respect that we ask our readers to show for the texts we produce. If we treat earlier texts with suspicion or cynicism, and refuse to take seriously the reasons that those we study offered for believing what they did, we invite the same suspicion and cynicism in our readers.[19]

Studying the history of modern democracy in the North Atlantic is urgent in the twenty-first century for two reasons. First, the disappearance of

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rival political systems has paradoxically made the internal inconsistencies and fuzziness of democracy even more apparent and nettlesome. Second, the flexibility and open-endedness of democracy make it particularly suitable for cultures increasingly attuned to a scientific sensibility, committed to testing multiple hypotheses through trial and error and examining the consequences through open inquiry. The culture of stable, unchallenged hierarchy faded as the culture of science emerged, because whereas authority dictates obedience, democracy should accommodate experimentation. That orientation toward open-endedness and innovation helps explain the steady rise of democracy toward its current status as a nearly universally acclaimed ideal, but it also disguises another dynamic.

Once possibilities are unbounded, both for individuals seeking autonomy and for cultures seeking solutions to all social problems, disappointment becomes inevitable. Whereas in predemocratic and prescientific cultures status was largely fixed and horizons limited, in democratic cultures everyone can aspire to the pinnacles achieved by the most honored, the most affluent, the most brilliant, or the most virtuous. The logic of equality that undergirds democracy encourages such ambitions. Yet frustration necessarily accompanies those hopes, because by their very nature pinnacles cannot accommodate everyone who aspires to them. Thus democracy as it expands breeds optimism and disappointment, euphoria and despair, in an ineluctable dialectic. Once the barriers erected by hierarchy are dismantled, the promise of satisfaction beckons all citizens. But the logic of democracy dictates that the horizons of exceptional achievement will inevitably continue to recede. If we can learn to understand that dynamic, perhaps we can appreciate the irony of democratic virtue and find in it not grounds for despair but reasons for continued resolution. The historical understanding of democracy might also help us get beyond our current tendency to frame disagreements as all-or-nothing struggles between good and evil, between freedom and oppression, and to see instead that democracy inevitably—necessarily—involves endless negotiation and compromise between competing values and worldviews. We can redeem the promise of democracy only if we realize that democracy, by always kindling hopes for change, forever feeds frustrations, in part because of the tensions between democratic principles and in part because our struggles to resolve certain problems inevitably create others.

Today's sophisticated diagnosticians of the social sciences know more about our condition than ever before, and not surprisingly many people infer that we should be able to cure what ails us. But the very bluntness of democracy, its inadequacy as a tool to slice through to the core of social problems with a single, penetrating stroke, might be what prevents fatal experiments

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of the sort that originated in quests for quick and sure solutions and ended with death and destruction. Democratic politics resembles ancient healing more than modern medicine: it promises no surgical miracles but usually keeps the patient alive. Studying several centuries of modern history shows how hard it has been to nurture democratic cultures. The frustrations of our imperfect democracies will continue to annoy us. The solutions we try will generate unexpected problems, and attempts to solve them will plunge us into new conflicts with unforeseeable and sometimes tragic consequences. The long and often bloody history of establishing self-government in the North Atlantic world, the story told in the chapters that follow, also shows why democracy, despite its difficulties, remains among our most precious cultural achievements.

The story told here may not inspire hope because it reveals how and why democracy, so inspiring as an idea, has proved so unsatisfying in practice. Democracy depends on cultural resources that the struggle to achieve democracy can erode, and the successful creation of self-government unleashes forces that can endanger the sensibilities it requires. War, particularly civil war, has an especially devastating effect, and for that reason the cultural consequences of civil war for democracy can last for generations, even centuries, as has been true of the European wars of religion, the English Civil War, the civil war that the French Revolution became, and the United States Civil War.

The consequences of establishing democratic institutions of government have been neither what the thinkers studied here intended nor what they anticipated. They thought that individuals, who come to consciousness in communities and traditions, both cultural and religious, would learn to form preferences not merely in response to their desires but in relation to ethical standards. This book explores the changing ideas of democratic theorists who probed and contested not only the operation of popular government but also the philosophical underpinnings on which democracy must rest, and it shows their nations' inability to construct cultures of democracy oriented toward the ideas of autonomy and reciprocity they prized.

These multiple discrepancies between intentions and results constitute the tragic irony of democracy. Awareness of the reasons why a shadow has fallen between democrats' aspirations and their achievements may temper—but need not extinguish—our hopes for democracy. Instead historical understanding should help us see how the legacies of past conflicts, particularly the still-smoldering embers from earlier civil wars, continue to obstruct efforts to fulfill the promise of democracy. Identifying those roots might enable us to see more clearly the nature and the depth of the challenges we face.

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PART I | Roots and Branches

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CHAPTER 1

Born in Bloodshed

The Origins of Democracy

FROM HIS CHÂTEAU situated between Bordeaux and Bergerac in southwestern France, Michel de Montaigne could see the ragged armies approach. Bands of soldiers, some Catholic, some Protestant, roamed the countryside of Périgord during the wars of religion that raged for decades in sixteenth-century France. In 1585, when the Catholic Montaigne returned to the writer's life he had abandoned to serve as mayor of Bordeaux, he found himself in trouble. One of his aristocratic neighbors, arriving on horseback, breathlessly begged him for refuge from the superior forces of a rival lord threatening to butcher his troops.

Montaigne knew the dangers of his age. He had been abducted, taken to a forest, and robbed earlier while traveling through a hostile region supposedly under a truce between Protestants and Catholics. As a result of "our civil wars," he had written, France was rich in examples of vicious cruelty. Catholic and Protestant soldiers alike showed a passion for inflicting pain. "I could hardly persuade myself, before I had actual evidence," Montaigne wrote, "that there exist any souls so unnatural as to commit murder for the mere pleasure of doing so." Alert to such threats, and already suspicious of the neighbor seeking his help, Montaigne could neither wholeheartedly believe his tale nor dismiss it. Everyone had enemies, and the story seemed plausible. When five more haggard-looking soldiers rode up, repeating their commander's story, Montaigne allowed them into his courtyard. Several more groups of armed horsemen followed them. Now, thanks to the trust he had extended, Montaigne found himself facing two dozen mounted soldiers who, he gradually realized, had come intending at least to rob and probably to kill him. As when he was kidnapped, he thought death was at hand.[1]

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Montaigne escaped with his life on both occasions. The intruder to his château later told Montaigne that "my face and my open-heartedness had removed his treacherous intentions." In the forest, his captors' "miraculous repentance" extended even to returning all his stolen goods. The band's leader then removed his mask, identified himself, and told Montaigne that "I owed this deliverance to my face, to my freedom and firmness of speech." Montaigne's enemies expected him, as a distinguished member of the French nobility, to snarl with contemptuous defiance and demonstrate through heroic death the magnificence of his courage and his virtue. Instead, he conceded their advantage and met their threats with dumbfounding temperance and humility. His manner, Montaigne explained, sustained him not only in life-threatening moments but every day.[2]

Montaigne adhered to his ethic of reciprocity when powerful as well as powerless. While still serving as mayor of Bordeaux, he got word of a plot against his life hatched by dissident Catholic soldiers. Dissatisfied with his lack of zeal against the hated Huguenots (as French Protestants were called), they planned to murder him during a review of his troops. Again Montaigne understood the danger. An earlier mayor of the city had been killed by an unruly mob that he tried vainly to calm. Montaigne's aides urged him to disarm the troops; instead he called for "volleys loud and lusty" to demonstrate his confidence in them.

Montaigne's ethic was not utilitarian; its value did not depend on its results. In an unpredictable world, he reasoned, we can never know with certainty the consequences of our behavior. We can only act as we see fit. In place of the earlier aristocratic ethic of stoic hardness and haughtiness, which identified yielding with commoners, Montaigne cultivated an ethic of reciprocity in which the distinctions between the strong and the weak, the merciful and the forgiven, could be blurred through the mutual acknowledgment of autonomy and the extension of trust.[3] Whether submitting without fear or pardoning without fear, Montaigne believed that the willingness to yield might nurture respect that could otherwise never be achieved. Although the admission of vulnerability and the ethic of reciprocity might not bring an end to civil war or ensure one's safety, their absence assured the continuation of endless conflict. In 1576, Montaigne had a bronze medallion struck with two inscriptions. One side read "Je m'abstiens," or "I restrain myself," the principle that more than once saved his life. The other side asked a question equally out of favor in a time of religious fervor: "Que sçais-je?" or "What do I know?"[4] Whereas passion and certainty were watchwords during the wars of religion, the emergence of democracy would require an ethic of reciprocity grounded on restraint and doubt.

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Like many other new ideas in sixteenth-century Europe, Montaigne's convictions originated in response to the new world of America. Reports from explorers and encounters with Indians brought to France jarred Montaigne's sensibility from the well-worn grooves of European culture. Some of his most provocative essays, especially "On Custom," "On Vehicles," and "On Cannibals," show how exposure to cultural diversity could unsettle conventional ideas. In the latter essay Montaigne contrasted the forms of torture preferred by Christians to the reported practices of some Indian tribes and warned his readers against reviling the natives' "horrible savagery" while remaining blind to their own. It seems no less savage, Montaigne observed, "to tear by rack and torture a body still full of feeling, to roast it by degrees," and then feed it to dogs and swine—a practice his French contemporaries had not only read about but also witnessed, and between their neighbors and fellow citizens, under the cover of religious fervor—"than to roast and eat a man after he is dead." Instead of finding in reports of cannibalism evidence of the superiority of Christian cultures, Montaigne challenged Europeans' tendency to "call barbarous anything that is contrary to our own habits."[5]

So devastatingly did Montaigne ridicule Europeans' pretension that their cultural standards conformed to reason and nature that he has often been characterized as a skeptic who doubted the very possibility of reliable knowledge. As he put it in "On Experience," which he placed at the end of his last volume of essays, "There is nothing inherently just; customs and laws make justice." Yet such judgments did not propel Montaigne toward skepticism. He did not doubt that we can acquire valuable knowledge from experience. He doubted only that we can achieve certainty.[6] Montaigne did not offer an early version of the thoroughgoing skepticism that later thinkers such as René Descartes and Francis Bacon felt compelled to confront and go beyond in order to begin what was later called the scientific revolution. Montaigne not only posed the crucial question "What do I know?"; he also insisted that we proclaim our answers not dogmatically but with chastened restraint. His sober commitment to continuing investigation derived from the experience of knowing how often we are proven not just wrong but inane: "One must learn that one is nothing but a fool."[7]

Against the warring zealots of his day, Montaigne counseled conversation. The give-and-take of discussion, when allowed to proceed freely, can pry open a mind sealed shut by dogmatism. Reading pales by comparison: "The most fruitful and natural exercise for our minds is, in my opinion, conversation." Because Montaigne so willingly conceded the limits of his own knowledge, he welcomed the challenge of different views. He conceded that since he frequently contradicted himself, as exasperated readers of his *Essays* have

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long noted, contradictory opinions "neither offend nor estrange me; they only arouse and exercise my mind." Only by exchanging ideas can we see our own errors or hope to persuade those who disagree with us. Conversation, by showing us how little we know and reminding us how little others think we know, helps us see our limits. It is a great school of restraint. Recalling Democritus, Montaigne contended that truth is not "hidden in the depths of the abyss" where we humans might uncover it. It is instead "situated rather at an infinite height in the divine understanding." His conclusion joins both sides of his medal: "The world is but a school of inquiry."[8]

France was plunged into civil war when Protestants and Catholics alike stopped arguing and starting fighting. Bloodshed would end only when they mastered their desire for dominance, conceded their ignorance, and extended to their enemies the mercy that both François, duc de Guise, and Montaigne, mayor of Bordeaux, had shown theirs. In a letter he wrote in 1590 to Henry of Navarre, a Protestant whom many moderate Catholics like Montaigne thought stood the best chance of bringing peace to France, Montaigne counseled Henry to demonstrate restraint and mercy. At the time Henry was still fighting to consolidate the control over his fractious realm that he would exercise after converting to Catholicism and reigning as Henry IV. "It has often been observed," Montaigne wrote, "that where conquests, because of their greatness and difficulty, could not be thoroughly completed by arms and by force, they have been completed by clemency and magnificence."[9] Montaigne practiced what he preached. He declined to fortify his château and declared himself ready to submit to royal authority. From his perspective, that submission was the sign of his autonomy, not its negation. The ethic of reciprocity requires mutuality, and that mutuality requires the autonomy of both parties. Trust cannot be secured until it is first extended.[10]

The central ideas Montaigne advanced in his essays correspond to those already identified in the introduction as central to democracy. Given his emphasis on mutual respect, his lampooning of convention, and his conception of truth as whatever is discovered through inquiry, Montaigne might seem a likely champion of democracy. But he was no democrat. Instead he decisively denounced democracy, for reasons that help explain why the idea of popular sovereignty found almost no adherents in Europe for another century. Montaigne's watchwords, restraint and doubt, required self-mastery of a sort he judged exceedingly difficult to achieve. As he wrote in his *Essays*, "The knowledge of his duty should not be left to each man's judgment; it should be prescribed to him, not left to the choice of his reason."[11] The mob, after all, had killed the mayor of Bordeaux. The people of Athens in their wisdom had condemned Socrates to death.

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Montaigne returned repeatedly to the fate of that earlier proponent of doubt and paragon of freethinking virtue, whose trial and conviction showed how little faith ordinary people deserve. Montaigne admired Socrates for choosing death rather than renouncing his convictions, but he also likened his defiance before his accusers to that of the cannibals who refused ever to yield in battle and preferred death to surrender. From Montaigne's perspective, that courage expressed an ethic of stoic resistance quite distinct from the ethic of reciprocity he counseled. Even though he conceded that submission and mercy might be inadequate tools for forging justice, he distanced himself from the heroic ethic of Socrates—and that of the rumored cannibals—in order to advance an alternative that he thought only a few hardy souls could achieve. More demanding than the willingness to die is the willingness to forgive. The willingness to yield, when freely chosen, can be more heroic than courage. Before peace is possible, Montaigne suggested, we must be sufficiently in control of ourselves, sufficiently autonomous, to submit freely to authority. The alternative is endless war. Montaigne doubted that more than a very few could become members of a true aristocracy of spirit, capable of doubt, restraint, and the ethic of reciprocity. For that reason he urged obedience to monarchy and religious authority: "All deference and submission is due" to kings "except that of the understanding. My reason was not formed to bow and stoop—that is for my knee."[12]

In his essay "On Physiognomy," Montaigne proclaimed the two commitments that propelled him away from the principles of democracy. First, he asked plaintively, "Is there any political wrong so bad that it is worth fighting with so deadly a drug as civil war?" That haunting question has continued to echo into our own time. From Montaigne's perspective, only a powerful monarch could end the wars of religion, and for that reason establishing the legitimacy of authority and the obligation of obedience eclipsed every other consideration. Second, "True freedom is to have complete power over one's own activities."[13] Such autonomy, Montaigne believed, is compatible with monarchy because autonomy requires self-restraint, or self-mastery, rather than the absence of all constraint. Submission that is part of a deliberate exchange calculated to achieve the peace makes possible not only independence but life itself. Montaigne's experience of the masses' murderous credulity and his reading of Greek and Roman history convinced him that ordinary people could not achieve the autonomy that an ethic of reciprocity would require.

Most of his contemporaries rejected most of what Montaigne believed, especially the ideas that make him important to us and to the history of democratic cultures. But they agreed with him in dismissing the prospect of popular government. The evidence of two millennia proved to them the

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undesirability, and perhaps even the impossibility, of democracy. Montaigne nevertheless helped articulate the ideas on which democracy depends. Indeed, in the recurring pattern of unanticipated and unintended consequences that has marked the history of democracy in Europe and America, some of those most skeptical about popular government have advanced it. Conversely, its self-proclaimed stalwarts have at times obstructed its progress.

Democracy begins in bloodshed, in eras such as the one in which Montaigne lived. To survive, however, let alone thrive, it requires a culture of mutual respect. Popular government often emerges as a result of conflicts that turn violent, but it cannot be established or sustained unless people are willing to let their worst enemies exercise power if they win an election. That willingness requires the predisposition that I have characterized as the ethic of reciprocity. In its absence, democracy is impossible; even in its presence, democracy is fragile. Although issues in politics often seem too important to submit to a vote or a jury of randomly selected citizens, sustaining democracy depends on individuals' willingness to do just that. Either rejecting the outcome of established procedures such as elections or trials or responding to defeat with violence is fatal to democracy. Conceding legitimacy to opponents requires both Montaigne-like forbearance and humility, because it signals the realization that one might be wrong and one's foes might be right. That willingness has been uncommon in human history, which explains why democracies have been rare and why they have rarely lasted long.

All histories of democracy must begin by considering developments in the ancient Near East, the warring city-states of classical Greece, and the beginnings of Christianity during the mighty but brittle republic of Rome. As those early examples show, beneath the principles of popular sovereignty, autonomy, and equality lie commitments to deliberation, pluralism, and the ethic of reciprocity.

The admonition to treat your neighbor as you would like to be treated yourself, which we know as the golden rule, dates back at least to the tenth century BCE. Early versions of the golden rule appeared in the law codes of the ancient Near East, and the oldest books of the Hebrew Bible contain variants on the theme. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," reads a verse in Leviticus. Elsewhere in the Torah the people of Israel are enjoined, as part of their covenant with the Lord, to treat each other with fairness, not to oppress strangers, and to care for widows, orphans, and the poor among them. The form of these Jewish laws follows the standard structure of covenant codes. Such treaties, in which subjects (or vassals) pledged to obey all-powerful rulers, were common in the ancient Near East. The distinctive feature of the Jewish scriptures had to do with God's commitment to treat with infinite

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mercy the people who had bound themselves to his law. By rendering even the King of Kings subject to the code of the covenant, the Torah itself established, over the seven centuries of its composition, the earliest irony of self-government: if their God bound himself to obey a self-imposed law, then his people were likewise bound to honor the covenant that their God had made with them.[14]

The logic of the covenant thus pointed in the direction of establishing the unlimited authority of the law and implied the limited authority of any particular king. Along with the Ten Commandments given to Moses, the covenant, as articulated in Exodus and Leviticus, elevated the principle of the golden rule. But the Torah did not provide clear guidelines indicating exactly how the people of God should arrange their own government. The authority of Saul, the first king of Israel, and his successors was said to descend directly, as did that of Moses, from the authority of Yahweh the lawgiver. Yet because a gap remained between the undeniable authority of the divine source of law and the necessity of interpreting the meaning of those laws, disagreements among people claiming to act according to God's will emerged almost immediately and never ceased. Claiming to interpret God's will more accurately, prophets repeatedly challenged the legitimacy of rulers. Centuries of rabbinical commentary offered layers of differing interpretation. Because none enjoyed unrivaled supremacy within the varieties of Jewish practice, over the course of generations disputing the law became the norm. By virtue of the Jewish commitment to deliberation, the meaning of humility as well as autonomy, and of equality as well as the ethic of reciprocity, both within Israel itself and in its relations with its neighbors, remained open to interpretation even though bound by law.[15]

In Greece, where no single god and no single idea of law reigned supreme, competing ideas about—and practices of—government likewise emerge from the earliest records of the archaic period (seventh and sixth centuries BCE). Although no direct line connects early Greek democracy to more recent forms of self-government, many of the controversies about democracy among contemporary historians and political theorists echo those among classical Greek writers—and among scholars who study the changing values and practices of Greek city-states from the fifth through the fourth century BCE. Ever since late-medieval and early-modern European thinkers, indebted to the work of Byzantine and Islamic scholars who kept these records alive, became acquainted with this Greek heritage, what happened in Greece has mattered profoundly to Europeans. Democracy in Greece originated in religious practice and matured as the best means to counter aristocratic rule. But Greek democracy differed strikingly from later versions, primarily because it depended

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centrally on the use of sortition, or lottery, to choose members of the assembly and other government officials. Although the earliest uses of sortition are disputed, it seems likely that reliance on a lottery was initially associated with fate or the will of the gods: decisions made by chance rather than by deliberate human choice could be interpreted as divinely sanctioned.

The reasons behind the initial appearance of democracy in Greek political life remain unknown. It is clear, however, that even in Homer and Hesiod individual choices were deemed important, and the people were thought to play a crucial role in public life by participating in the assembly and insuring that their leaders remained subject to the law. When the aristocratic rulers of archaic Greek city-states wanted to extend their power, they needed help. To secure the loyalty of the farmers whom they enlisted as soldiers in their military campaigns, they began experimenting with different forms of government. Herodotus, who wrote the first history of Greece, offered three criteria for popular rule: the use of lot to select officials, the accountability of those officials to the wider public, and the ultimate location of decision making in a popular assembly consisting of all citizens. Such forms of government emerged in some Greek city-states from the sixth through the fourth century BCE.[16]

In Athens democratic rule matured thanks to the innovations of Solon. Chosen as chief magistrate in 594 BCE, Solon challenged the oligarchic rule of a landed aristocracy by instituting debt relief and empowering a council of four hundred citizens. He changed the criterion for election to the council, which set the agenda for the assembly, from family to wealth, thereby at least opening the door to the more democratic forms of government that were to follow. In the words Aristotle used to summarize the assessment of later commentators, "Solon was an excellent lawgiver who broke the over-exclusive nature of the oligarchy, ended the slavery of the common people, and established the ancient democracy with a well-balanced constitution."[17] Solon sought to balance the power of the wealthy (the word *aristocratia* combined the Greek root for "the excellent" with the suffix for "power") against that of the community of citizens (*democratia*).[18] Although members of the council were elected, other officials were chosen by lot. Every citizen could participate in the assembly and enjoyed equal status before the law. After Solon's death, Athens slid quickly from democracy to tyranny, but given the already well-established traditions of popular engagement, even the ensuing "age of tyrants"—in Athens and elsewhere—could be seen as contributing to Greek democracy by galvanizing the people against autocratic rule.[19]

Athens emerged as a full-fledged, self-conscious democracy in the years following 508 BCE, when Cleisthenes was recalled to power by the people of Athens. He instituted reforms that weakened the power of the wealthy and

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consolidated popular government. Cleisthenes further broadened membership in the council to include five hundred citizens elected from those put forward by the *demoi* or demes, the villages in the vicinity of Athens or the districts of the city itself. Members of the council, who served for one year and no more than two nonconsecutive years, were responsible for administering the government, making decisions about foreign policy, and setting the agenda for the assembly. Roughly 25 percent of the 120,000 people of Athens were citizens, and as many as 6,000 of those 30,000 citizens gathered almost every week to speak, listen, and render judgment in the assembly. As important as rhetorical skills were for the minority of citizens who delivered speeches before the assembled citizens, members of the assembly did not deliberate. After hearing a series of formal orations, the assembly voted, by voice, simply yes or no. An even larger number of citizens, selected by lot as were those who served in the assembly, participated as members of juries in Athenian law courts.[20]

Sortition was thought to remove the dangers of faction and the possibility of rule by elites or experts. Only those who put their names forward could be chosen, yet sortition engaged more than half the citizens of Athens in public life, giving them both the opportunity and the responsibility to make laws and render judgments. A few crucial positions, notably those involving the administration of finance and military command, were always decided by election rather than lot, and those elected were subject to removal by the assembly. It was no empty threat. From time to time even the most celebrated, including Pericles (c. 495–420 BCE), were discharged from office. By breaking down the older kin-based networks and engaging more people in public life, sortition and the other reforms instituted under Cleisthenes not only invigorated public life but also turned Athens into a formidable military power. In time renewed jockeying for position among leading families prompted yet another round of democratic reforms, engineered by Ephialtes and consummated by his successor, Pericles, from 462 to 450 BCE. Once more aimed at the oligarchy that had again taken control of public life, this constitution, which also used sortition to secure citizens' participation, ushered in the golden age of classical Greek civilization.[21]

During the next century, as democracy matured in Athens, an unexpected rationale emerged thanks to the historian Thucydides. Although himself critical of popular government, Thucydides provided an enduring statement of classical democratic ideals. In his rendering of a funeral oration delivered in 431 BCE, after one of the early battles of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides put these now-familiar words in the mouth of Pericles: "Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the

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whole people." Since all women, children, and slaves, and all Athenians not born to citizens, were barred from participating, the claim was overblown. Yet the assumption that free, native-born, adult male property owners constituted the "whole people" governed Western democratic theory and practice until at least the late eighteenth century.

Whenever disputes emerged, Thucydides continued, "everyone"—i.e., every free male with property—was considered "equal before the law." Every time Athenians selected individuals for "positions of public responsibility," what mattered was not "membership in a particular class, but the actual ability which the man possesses. No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty." Although that claim expressed an Athenian ideal, it was another exaggeration: even after Cleisthenes introduced modest compensation for jury service, only citizens with a reliable flow of household labor from dependent women and slaves could afford the demands of extended public service. The ideals of equality and autonomy, however, as well as the institutions of sortition and rotation in office, did distinguish Athens from some of its rival Greek city-states.

Those differences extended from politics to culture, and the link between the two domains, although contested, has remained a crucial issue for democracies ever since. In the words Thucydides attributed to Pericles, "Just as our political life is free and open, so is our day-to-day life in our relations with each other." Athenian citizens did not mind if "a neighbor enjoys himself in his own way"; in their "private lives" they were "free and tolerant." Thucydides thus seemed to separate the private from the public sphere, a distinction later thinkers would inherit—and dispute.

The question of how we should understand the idea of individual rights in classical Athens remains hotly contested. Since all citizens considered themselves part of a civic community, the concept of rights to be exercised against that community seemed as incongruous as the idea of the wrist enjoying rights against the arm. If all Athenians shared but one common good, then the concepts of self-interest and an inviolable private sphere remained alien. No word expressing what we call "individual rights" existed in classical Greek. Although Pericles praised Athenians' open-mindedness toward each other, their toleration did not extend to open dissent or to the customs and ideals of other cultures. Whatever (limited) diversity Athenians might have accepted in private behavior, Pericles made clear that "in public affairs we keep to the law. This is because it commands our deep respect. We give our obedience to those whom we put in positions of authority, and we obey the laws themselves." Finally, although all citizens were thought equal before

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the law, Athenians understood that such equality was empty if it remained merely formal. It was necessary to pay particular attention, according to Pericles, to those laws concerned with "the protection of the oppressed." Athenian democracy was distinguished by an ethic of mutual respect among citizens and a particular concern with "the oppressed," two considerations that, although evidently not extending to women or slaves, did signal an awareness that democratic culture requires something more than the institutions of self-government.[22]

Periclean Athens was radically democratic compared with earlier and contemporary forms of government in the Greek city-states. Although Pericles thought that made "the school of Hellas" a model, some of the most influential philosophers of ancient Greece considered the democratic constitution of Athens its fatal flaw. When the works of Plato, Aristotle, and other writers such as Pseudo-Xenophon ("the Old Oligarch") were recovered in the hierarchical world of late-medieval Europe, the meanings of democracy were filtered through their criticism of popular government rather than the celebrations found in other classical texts. Orators such as Demosthenes, Aeschines, and Isocrates skewered wealthy individuals who dared put their own concerns above the public good. They extolled popular participation in public life because it provided freedom, equality, and justice for all citizens. Yet at times even these champions of the people lampooned sortition and praised elections as the best way to select qualified officials. Skilled rhetoricians speaking in the council, the assembly, or the law courts advanced conflicting ideas about the best way to secure the public good. At times criticizing democracy could prove dangerous.[23]

The best-known of these public trials concerned Socrates. According to his accusers, Socrates had characterized as "folly" the practice of "appointing public officials by lot." No one would choose "a pilot or builder or flautist by lot." That claim, his critics charged, had "led the young to despise the established constitution and made them violent."[24] Although Socrates denied the charge that his instruction corrupted Athenian youth, he rejected exile and accepted his sentence. He respected the legitimacy of the law, he explained, that had given him the freedom to think and teach and now condemned him to death. When Plato (428–347 BCE) immortalized his mentor in the *Apology*, however, he had Socrates dismiss democratic justice: "Please do not be offended if I tell you the truth," Plato's Socrates proclaimed. "No man on earth who conscientiously opposes either you or any other organized democracy, and flatly prevents a great many wrongs and illegalities from taking place in the state to which he belongs, can possibly escape with his life." From Plato's perspective, majority rule empowers the unenlightened many over the

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thoughtful few. For that reason "the true champion of justice, if he intends to survive even for a short time, must necessarily confine himself to private life" and leave politics—all forms of politics—alone.[25]

In the *Republic* Plato's Socrates described democracy as a travesty of justice in which all individuals, no matter how base their tastes or judgment, can do whatever they like. Authority, instead of being grounded on principles of truth and justice and exercised by those best suited to the task, is given to charlatans who promise to indulge the undisciplined passions and satisfy the insatiable appetites of the people. The "features of a democracy," in short, are "an agreeable form of anarchy with plenty of variety and an equality of a peculiar kind for equals and unequals alike." Thanks to interpreters of Plato, that unflattering image of democracy came to be as firmly associated with ancient Athens as its drama, art, or architecture.[26]

Of the many students in Plato's Academy, Aristotle (384–322 BCE) proved uniquely influential. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argued that virtue should be understood as a mean between extremes, and in politics the best path lay in a "mean" between popular and aristocratic rule. Claiming to base his conclusion not on reflection but on careful study of the consequences of a wide variety of political arrangements, Aristotle wrote that man is by nature a "political animal" equipped with not only the capacity for speech but also the capacity to reason and discern good from evil. Only in his appropriate setting, as a citizen within the framework provided by social organization within the *polis* or city-state, could man develop his capacity for virtue.[27] Aristotle rejected any notion of a prepolitical or presocial individual who might then form a compact with others. "A social instinct is implanted in all men by nature," he insisted, and "when perfected," man is the "best of animals." But "when separated from law and justice," as occurs when political order dissolves into anarchy, "he is the worst of all."[28]

Although Aristotle's writings disappeared for centuries, when his works resurfaced in late-medieval Europe he was christened "the master of those who know," and his writings exerted an enduring influence on later thinkers. Aristotle observed, following convention, that most governments had been either monarchical, aristocratic, or popular. Whenever the purpose of government shifts from the public interest to the self-interest of those in power, these three forms devolve into tyranny, oligarchy, or democracy. Best of all would be a mixed constitution, which Aristotle called a polity (*politeia)*, that would combine the strengths and control the weaknesses of all these forms in a hybrid variety of virtuous popular government, democracy tempered by aristocracy. Rather than depending too much on oligarchs' temptations to tyranny or the whims of an impoverished multitude, such a polity would rest

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most solidly on a dispersed agrarian or pastoral population of middling means.

Aristotle took for granted that all states contain poor, middling, and wealthy citizens. He linked the stability of his ideal mixed constitution with the virtuous moderation practiced by the rural middle class, those self-sufficient agrarians who do not covet the property of the rich but work too hard to be envied by the poor. Moreover, particularly if such a polity were large (yet not too large), it might escape the deadly tensions that derive from factions because "in small states it is easy for the whole body of citizens to become divided into two, which leaves no middle at all, and nearly everybody either rich or poor."[29] Aristotle agreed with Pericles that the principles of democracy are freedom and equality, but he insisted that in any real polity the passion for both must be constrained to prevent anarchy. In a democracy individuals want not to be ruled. They prefer to live as they choose, and precisely for that reason democracies spin out of control. When "whatever the majority decides is final and constitutes justice," people inevitably find that "freedom to do exactly what one likes cannot do anything to keep in check that element of badness which exists in each and all of us."[30] Aristotle thus identified one among the multiple unintended consequences of popular government: freeing individuals to follow their desires can erode the ethic of reciprocity on which democracy depends.

Collecting features from diverse historical and contemporary precedents, Aristotle listed those that characterize democracies. Public offices should be filled for short terms by different individuals, chosen by lot where appropriate or by election where necessary, because of either the need for expertise or the scale of the damage that could be done by the incompetent. In a democracy there should be few or limited property qualifications for citizenship. Citizens should be paid to serve on juries so all can participate in public life. Legislation should be decided by a sovereign assembly in which all citizens can speak. Finally, democracies tend to be dominated by those of "low birth, low incomes, and mechanical occupations," and it was Aristotle's obvious disdain for the judgment of such people that soured his admirers on democracy.[31] Aristotle's ideal mixed polity would adopt as many of those features as proved consistent with stability and exclude slaves, women, and foreigners, all of whom Aristotle deemed "irrational" because they lacked the deliberative faculty crucial for collective decision making. The capacity to see beyond narrow self-interest was the defining characteristic of the citizens of Aristotle's mixed polity. That commitment to the common good he considered both indispensable and fragile. Aristotle believed that sustaining an ethic of reciprocity when individuals enjoy the freedom to follow their narrower,

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less elevated desires would be the most difficult challenge facing citizens in a polity. Rotation in office, weighing alternative positions, and making judgments all engendered and required "considering the interest of others."[32]

Aristotle further claimed that "'ruling and being ruled in turn' is one element in liberty, and the democratic ideal of justice is in fact numerical equality, not equality based on merit."[33] In that simple sentence Aristotle collapsed three separable values that many later theorists of democracy struggled to keep distinct. First is the ethic of reciprocity, the awareness that all citizens rule and that no citizen is above the law. Second is the conception of liberty as self-rule, described later in the *Politics* as the ability to "live as you like," by which he meant freedom from domination; it was the opposite of being enslaved. Finally, democracy means that majorities rule whether their decisions are wise or foolish. Ideally, though, the majority rules according to "the idea of justice that is by common consent democratic," meaning that the poor "exercise no more influence in ruling than the rich, and do not have sole sovereign power, but all exercise it together on the basis of numerical equality." In sum, under a democratic constitution, based on an ethic of reciprocity, all citizens should enjoy both freedom and equality. But Aristotle distinguished between the arithmetical equality appropriate in many circumstances and the geometrical equality appropriate in public service. All citizens should be equal before the law, but political responsibilities and rewards should be proportionate to merit.[34]

Despite the appeal of a polity that would inculcate such a vibrant civic spirit, Aristotle worried that popular government can be unstable. The hybrid form he recommended would work best when citizens' interest in public affairs was tempered by a wholesome inclination to focus on productive labor rather than idle chatter. Aristotle's virtuous citizens thus "find more satisfaction in working on the land than in ruling and in engaging in public affairs." Busying themselves in their fields rather than scheming obsessively for individual gain or partisan political advantage, citizens should know the limits of their competency and trust the crucial issues of public life to the best qualified, most virtuous, and most politically adept of their neighbors.[35]

Such a polity would hardly suit all populations, Aristotle admitted, and his warnings echoed in the criticism expressed by later writers on democracy. Perhaps a city-state, lacking resources of its own, cannot be self-sufficient and must engage in extensive commerce. Perhaps, for various reasons, there must be more herdsmen than farmers, or, even worse, more mechanics, artisans, and merchants. Particularly in that case, in "the most extreme democracy," an urban population would insist that everyone should participate in politics. "Not every state can tolerate" that condition, "and it is not likely to last un-

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less it is well held together by its laws and customs." If deeply rooted, those laws and customs might prevent two otherwise likely outcomes. First, the poor should avoid antagonizing the rich, which inevitably propels the emergence of a powerful oligarchic reaction. Second, the rich should understand that it is in their interest to use their surplus wealth for those "in need, if possible in lump sums large enough for the acquisition of a small piece of land, but if not, enough to start a business, or work in agriculture." Such moderation was the only way to escape the instability engendered by extreme inequality.

The middle road of virtue that Aristotle judged desirable for each individual citizen would become possible only in the context of *politeia*. Thus policies preventing poverty and facilitating the achievement of moderate prosperity would be necessary to preserve the mixed constitution Aristotle recommended. In his day exemplars of such moderation were scarce both in ethics and in politics. As Athens struggled for dominance with its rival city-states, its own "laws and customs" proved too weak to prevent a widening gap between rich and poor, its political culture too weak to stave off oligarchic rule, and its military too weak to resist the invading armies of Macedonia. When Athenian democracy was flourishing, however, the principle of *isonomia* (equality before the law) and the practices of sortition, rotation in office, and the widespread participation of citizens in collective decision making helped reinforce the ethic of reciprocity and inculcate the values of autonomy and reciprocity that later champions of democracy would seek to nurture.[36]

Commentators on classical Athenian democracy understood its fragility. They had seen how skillful orators could become demagogues and tyrants. They knew that the assembly could not always discern the difference between talented but unscrupulous speakers and truly virtuous leaders. Demosthenes warned that "he who shall prevail by his words will hold office" in a democracy. Although Thucydides admired Pericles, he conceded that Pericles was able, "by his rank, ability, and known integrity," to "exercise an independent control over the multitude." Thanks to his exceptional abilities, "what was nominally a democracy became in his hands government by the first citizen." Isocrates emphasized the importance of uniting the ability to speak well with moral excellence; the first quality without the second spelled trouble for democracy. Just as the misgivings expressed by Plato and Aristotle shaped later commentators' judgments of popular government, so the warnings of Demosthenes, Thucydides, and Isocrates shaped the ideal of a well-rounded citizen qualified for leadership in a democracy. A popular leader, one capable of moving the masses with his words, had to be educated in—and had to

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embody—both moral and civic virtues. Otherwise, from the perspective of those schooled in the lessons of classical Greece, skilled rhetoricians might subvert rather than inspire the people, and democracy could deteriorate from Aristotle's ideal of a balanced polity to his nightmare of passionate excess.[37]

Important as the ideas of Aristotle proved to be to later conceptions of democracy, the account provided by Thucydides is crucial for understanding the cultural predispositions and practices necessary for its development. Through historical analysis, Thucydides revealed that tensions between individuals and cultural ideals are inescapable. He showed the inevitable gaps between aspirations and behavior, and between individuals' intentions and the consequences of their actions, in particular the distance between the high ideals of Pericles's funeral oration and the austere realism of the equally familiar Melian Dialogue of 416 BCE. In that classic exchange, representatives of the Athenian military engaged the council of Melos, a small island that had sought to preserve its neutrality. Power, the Athenians announced grandly, generates the only "standard of justice" that matters: "The strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept."[38]

Such cynicism boils down all human interaction to struggles of strength between self-interested parties. Thucydides showed that when that view prevailed within Athens itself, as well as in its relations with other states, it destroyed democracy. In short, whereas Aristotle suggested how a well-ordered state could avert conflict by suppressing unruly desire and cultivating virtue, Thucydides showed how and why Athenian democracy worked, and then why it failed not only to live up to its ideals but even to survive the city-state's efforts to dominate its neighbors. Whereas the intricate and unstable interactions of desire and reason, self-interest and responsibility, can be simplified or blurred by the abstractions of philosophy, they are less easily resolved in the messiness of human experience. The success of classical Athenian democracy, both in terms of citizens' internalizing its norms of self-rule and reciprocity and their ability to institutionalize them, fed its vanity. That inflated sense of its capacity drove Athens to assert its power, and that impulse collided with the equally ambitious aspirations of Sparta. As Thucydides made clear, even as Athenian leaders after Pericles failed to show his prudence or his judgment, so Athens itself proved unable to harness the qualities responsible for its ascension to prevent its defeat. When Pericles's successors abandoned his restraint, they found it impossible to satisfy either their own desire for military expansion or the rapidly expanding desires of their citizens. When the ethic of reciprocity faded in the later stages of classical Athenian democracy, so did the freedom and equality it made possible.

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All the advantages Athens achieved by forging unity in the *polis* through a robust democracy—the fostering of participation, the suppression of individual ambition, and the prevention of factions—did not enable it to recognize its limits when it encountered equally powerful rivals. The institutions of classical Athenian democracy served one purpose: by checking and channeling desires that ran counter to the public interest, they prevented any individual or group of individuals from subverting the common good. As the cynicism Athens displayed in Melos made clear, however, such equilibrium proved too fragile when confronted with resistance. The unity achieved by democratic freedom facilitated the expansion of Athens. Through Pericles's final speech, much longer and more impassioned than his funeral oration, Thucydides showed him invoking the importance of sacrifice for the common good in an effort to inspire Athens to persevere.

None of the leaders who followed Pericles matched his ability to persuade Athenians to look beyond the desires of the moment to see the longer view or their shared interest. When the people of Athens and their leaders indulged their ambitions, particularly in the disastrous Sicilian expeditions of 427 and 413 BCE, without heeding the constraints imposed by their changed circumstances, their continued efforts to expand blinded them to the ethic of reciprocity integral to the success of their democracy.[39]

Roman experiments with forms of popular governance began in the fifth century BCE, but the eventual replacement of republican by imperial rule etched deeply into postmedieval European memory anxieties about the people's capacity to govern. Of the many achievements of the Roman Empire, its most lasting contribution to the long-term development of democracy might have been its failed suppression of Christianity. Rome's glory rested on manipulating, when possible, or suppressing violently, when necessary, the will of the people. Although at least formally acknowledged in the *concilium plebis* established in 471 BCE, which indirectly empowered the people to vote for magistrates, the people enjoyed little effectual involvement in public life beyond voting yea or nay in occasional plebiscites and public trials. Some Roman ideas about the people's limited role in government derived from earlier indigenous practices of absolute monarchy, some were borrowed from Greek and Greco-Roman Stoic philosophy, and others wove together strands from both sources. Even at the height of Rome's republic, the regime nominally devoted to *res publica populi Romani*, the public thing of the Roman people, it was run by and for a small number of its wealthiest citizens, who monopolized the positions of consul, senator, and magistrate. Although groups of plebes formed clubs or gangs, often associated with religious cults distinct from those favored by patricians, these plebeian groups existed outside the

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formal decision-making process. Like the Greek city-states, Rome was effectively an oligopoly rather than a democracy, and it was slave labor from conquests that enabled its citizens to play their part in *res publica*.

Whereas some Greek writers had identified the virtues of direct democracy and others its dangers, writers on the Roman form of republican government focused on its practices of elections, representation, and plebiscites. The most influential of these writers, Polybius and Cicero, lived during the second and first centuries BCE, when the republic was wracked by the threat of civil war and giving way to imperial rule. The Greek-born Polybius offered a standard typology of governments ruled by the one, the few, and the many. But unlike Aristotle and other Greek critics of popular government, for whom democracy untempered by aristocracy was malignant, Polybius argued that the legitimacy of all three forms depends on the consent of the governed. Absent popular approval, kingship degenerates into tyranny, aristocracy into oligarchy, and democracy into mob rule. But each form is capable of excellence, including a properly functioning democracy in which "the majority decision prevails, but which retains the traditional values of piety toward the gods, care of parents, respect for elders, and obedience to the laws." Polybius further proposed a cyclical progression through these forms of government. The impulse toward reciprocity, which Polybius traced to the natural interaction of family members, and which he thought underlay all stable governance, sooner or later gave way to the use of fear to maintain order.

From the perspective of Polybius, the ideal constitution, such as the one Lycurgus gave Sparta, combined the best features of all three forms. When a polity's constitution enables the one, the few, and the many to check each other's potential excesses, and when it reinforces the ethic of reciprocity that Polybius judged crucial, healthy relations between king, aristocracy, and people are possible. Unfortunately, history showed Polybius that such balance rarely lasts long. Eventually the cycle recurs. Although the writings of Polybius disappeared and were only rediscovered, in fragments, during the Italian Renaissance, the ideas presented in book 6 of his *Histories* would have a profound impact on later thinkers.[40]

The most influential Roman political thinker, Cicero (106–43 BCE), saw the potential of a less polarized society and a government that bridged the gap between the privileged and the people. His writings helped shape later ideas about the possibility of popular government, but as a political actor Cicero did little to improve its prospects. From a wealthy but non-noble background, Cicero was catapulted to the consulship in 63 BCE as a result of his brilliance as an orator and because he represented an alternative to his rival Catiline, whom members of the Roman elite perceived as a threat to

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their rule. When Cicero unearthed evidence of a conspiracy that seemed to confirm those suspicions, he ordered the plotters executed without trial. Cicero defended that extreme step as necessary to preserve the republic, but it led to his own brief exile after the First Triumvirate of Pompey, Crassus, and Julius Caesar took power in 60 BCE. Out of power, Cicero had time to write.

Because most of Cicero's writings take the form of dialogues between characters with distinctly different points of view, his own views cannot always be identified with confidence. Cicero presented skeptical and historicist arguments concerning the variability of cultures, the inevitable discrepancy between right and necessity, and the excellent reasons why we should embrace rather than deny uncertainty. He also disputed the cynical proposition that all notions of right and wrong are rooted in nothing more solid than the shifting sands of custom. He entertained the idea, gaining popularity among Roman jurists, of a universal natural law governing all people, although he doubted that individuals—or political leaders—could always know it or follow it. Coupled with the Stoic doctrine that all individuals possess a divine spark that makes them worthy of respect, Cicero's stern ethics required not only self-restraint but also, contrary to the practice of his time, reciprocity, which he considered a moral as well as political ideal. Against the savvy wisdom that counseled choosing the useful over the right course of action, Cicero insisted that the choice is false: in the long run only the good proves useful.

Cicero wrote many books but produced fewer new ideas. He proclaimed that public virtues such as generosity and patriotism "originate in our natural inclination to love our fellow men," which he deemed the "foundation of justice." Such inclinations, although natural, find expression only through the exercise of "right reason." Like Aristotle, Cicero was skeptical about popular government because he doubted the masses could master their inclinations in order to govern "as slaves to the public interest." Subordinating the self to advance the common good was the only path toward Cicero's goal of civic harmony, and he did not think ordinary people were up to that arduous task.[41] Cicero believed that the Roman republic, at its best, mixed elements of monarchy in its consuls, aristocracy in its senate, and democracy in the people's right to vote for those who would represent them.[42]

Cicero's admonitions to high-minded public service inspired many of his contemporaries and many later readers. They did not, however, save Cicero himself. In the wake of Julius Caesar's assassination, again fearing the end of republican rule and fatally abandoning his usual prudence, a tendency that many have interpreted as indecisiveness, Cicero delivered a series of orations attacking Marc Antony. Like many other Roman rulers denounced as tyrants,

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Antony knew there are two ways to understand reciprocity. Cicero himself had written that "men are both the greatest benefit and the greatest harm to each other."[43] When Antony joined with Lepidus and Octavian (the future Caesar Augustus) to form the Second Triumvirate in 43 BCE, Cicero was declared an enemy of the state and executed.

Cicero's ideal of "mutual helpfulness" extended the individual's responsibility beyond family, clan, and republic to all humanity, at least in principle. But like Polybius and consistent with the hierarchical and patriarchal assumptions that governed Roman culture, Cicero did not doubt that duties could be ranked in order of importance from those to the gods, then to the fatherland, to one's parents, and so on down to the strangers whom one need only avoid harming. It was the connections dictated by the desire for honor and the realities of mastery and dependence that stabilized Roman society. Like every other Roman citizen, Cicero admired heroes who died with valor to enhance the glory of Rome and urged even the powerful to sacrifice their interests for the good of the whole. Yet the notion that the worthiest of all should allow himself to be humiliated and sacrificed for the sake of the least worthy never entered Cicero's mind. To most Romans of his day such sacrifice, motivated by selfless love, seemed absurd, contrary to all standards of honor.

Christian morality, by rejecting the Roman moral code and inserting in its place an ethic of love, implicitly threatened Rome's identification of honor with martial glory and the social and political structures that went along with it. Christians insisted on the spiritual potential of every soul and simultaneously emphasized human sinfulness and heavenly rewards, divine judgment rather than political justice. Early Christians stressed the importance of taking care of those in need, a theme prominent in books of the Hebrew Bible such as Isaiah and central to the Christian gospels. There were no Greek or Roman equivalents to the central theological virtues of Christianity: faith, hope, and especially charity. Nor did ancient philosophers see the value of humility or repentance, two other virtues that distinguished Christianity from classical thought and left a permanent imprint on the modern North Atlantic cultures in which modern democracy emerged centuries later. The first were to be last, the last first: "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." None—not even the shunned, such as tax collectors, or the most reviled, such as prostitutes—were to be excluded. Such admonitions were not unprecedented within Judaism. Hillel, a Babylon-born rabbi living in Jerusalem c. 30 BCE–10 CE, taught a moderate version of Jewish law that inspired a vibrant tradition centered on the ethic of reciprocity. According to Hillel, the core of Judaism, in addition to

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the love of the Lord, could be stated simply. In the familiar words of one of the central axioms attributed to him, "What is hateful to thee, do not unto thy fellow man; this is the whole law. The rest is commentary."[44]

Arising from the tradition of Judaism represented by Hillel and inspired by the life of Jesus Christ, Christianity originated in just such a series of commentaries, produced decades after Jesus died. Because Jesus, like Hillel, left no sacred texts proclaiming his teachings in his own words, differences of emphasis and interpretive disagreements among his followers marked the Christian community from the beginning. Such discursive proliferation might have inaugurated a diverse and pluralistic set of religious assemblies, relishing debate and encouraging dissent, faithful only to Christ's unambiguous central message that his followers should, above all, love one another. Just as Jews in Jesus's day disagreed over which interpretations of their tradition should prevail, those of the strict School of Shammai or those of Hillel, so Christians from the first century struggled to work out the implications of their faith, including its political consequences.

The most revolutionary aspect of the Christian message was the challenge to Roman assumptions concerning hierarchy and honor. Those Jews first drawn to the Christian message were themselves outsiders. Once Saul of Tarsus converted to Christianity, he carried that openness even further by suggesting that gentiles could become Christians without first becoming Jews. Although some Christians had and kept possessions, including the houses where the early Christians assembled, they departed from the Roman practice of using charity to demonstrate their own grandeur—and establish their dominance over those beneath them. Early Christian communities established instead the revolutionary practice of giving freely, anonymously, and on a regular basis to those in need, including foreigners who shared their faith but whom they had never met. If Hillel could encapsulate all of Jewish teaching into a single sentence, so the Gospel of Matthew could have Jesus compress his message into two equally brief admonitions: first love God, then love your neighbor as yourself.[45] Those two simple commandments, Jesus assured those who were trying to trip him up, contained all of Jewish law and all the wisdom of the prophets. Paul later underscored the point: "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free." But you should not use your freedom to indulge your desire for pleasure. Instead you should "serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"[46]

This ethic of brotherhood, grounded on the principle of universal benevolence that Jesus preached, did not entail a frontal challenge to the institution of slavery or the subordination of children and women to their fathers and husbands. Those relationships were not only taken for granted, by

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Christians and Jews as well as Greeks and Romans, but also served as paradigms for every Christian's willingness to serve her or his divine master. Christian morality nevertheless did translate into a different attitude toward human relations that would prove profoundly important to later generations. In his letters to early Christian communities, Paul recommended the virtues of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. He advised slaves to "obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ." In principle at least, Christianity transformed the entire framework of domination as well as service. "Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven."[47] In another letter Paul counseled his friend Philemon to embrace his runaway slave Onesimus, now that both had become Christians, and treat him "no longer as a slave, but instead of a slave as a brother most dear, especially to me, and how much more to thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord!" In a culture saturated with slavery, Paul underscored the radicalism of his message: "If, therefore, thou dost count me as a partner, welcome him as thou wouldst me."[48]

Although there were, of course, significant precedents for the virtue of benevolence, in Christianity it became central. In the School of Hillel and in ancient Roman philosophy, notably in Stoicism and Cynicism, could be found scattered recommendations of a simple life of self-denial and generosity toward others. The Christian gospels carried the injunction further both by extending it to all people—not excluding women, slaves, and foreigners, all of whom were to be treated as equals—and by warning that even such praiseworthy behavior should not become a basis for pride, because pride was itself problematic. Such self-abnegation, patterned on Christ's crucifixion, served to remind humans to seek salvation rather than early success, and it carried ambiguous implications for the relation of Christians to the world around them. Unsettling to Greeks and Romans alike, early Christians forged communities practicing the virtues Jesus embodied and admonished others to do the same. In the first-century Acts of the Apostles, the earliest disciples were described as "holding all things in common" and distributing what they owned "according to each individual's needs."[49] The first Christians hoped thereby to influence others and draw them to the Christian faith, in the process widening and deepening the life of their assemblies.

As their numbers grew, differences inevitably emerged. Some welcomed the continuing proliferation of interpretations and practices, seeing in that

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diversity God's spirit at work. They agreed with Paul's advice in his letters about the fruitfulness of humility and forbearance—and the need to continue to experiment—as reflections of humans' limited understanding of God's will. In Paul's words to the Christian assembly of Thessalonians, "Do not extinguish the spirit. Do not despise prophecies. But test all things; hold fast that which is good."[50] Others disagreed with Paul's approach. Many, including those of Jesus's followers who produced the first gospels, feared diversity might end in anarchy. In that case Christ's example and his central message would be lost. Within several generations, a new authority, formalized in scriptures including Paul's letters and accounts of Jesus's life provided by the evangelists Mark, Matthew, Luke, and, later, John, had been established.[51]

The previously open-ended, egalitarian communities of Christians began to take a rather different shape, in part to stave off heresy and in part from fear of Roman authorities, who saw in Christians' renunciation of Roman gods a potential threat to Roman authority and law. The systematic persecution of Christians began during the catastrophic reign of Nero (54–68), gathered momentum under Domitian (81–96), and peaked in the second half of the third century. In response Christian communities turned inward. Christian writers, of whom Origen (??–251) was the most influential, began creating a theology to supplement Paul's admonitions and the narratives of Jesus's life. These writers worked to amalgamate traditions of Greco-Roman philosophy with the teachings of Jesus by replacing the centrality of the crucifixion and resurrection with a cosmic history that emanates from the divine Logos and culminates in the emergence of Israel and the eventual triumph of Christianity, now characterized as the world's first universal religion. Its rigorous ethic, its concern for the poor, and the devotion of its adherents, whose martyrdom testified powerfully to the depth of their commitment, helped Christianity gain support among the Roman elite. The identification of the church with the state in the fourth century, however, just when Rome was beginning to collapse, proved disastrous to the original ideas of unselfish love and humility. Christian writers had always been ambivalent about whether believers should be engaged in society or steer clear of its corruption. Now they began explicitly to deprecate public service of any sort, a dynamic that did not help Rome, now formally Christian, defend itself against invaders from the North.[52]

The long-term consequences for democracy of the most influential Christian writer of the fifth century, Augustine of Hippo (354–430), were profound and paradoxical. By his own admission, Augustine began his adult life as a libertine. He ended as the most influential theologian of the first millennium. From 395 until his death, with invaders at the gates of his city,

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Augustine served as bishop of Hippo, in present-day Algeria. In his *Confessions*, the first spiritual autobiography ever written, he attributed his renunciation of a life devoted to pleasure to his reading of Cicero's *Hortensius*, a book based on Aristotle's *Protrepticus*. Both of these now-lost books invited readers to the satisfactions of a life lived in devotion to philosophy, and Augustine credited Cicero with setting him on the road that led eventually away from the paganism of Augustine's father and toward the Christianity embraced by his mother, Monica.[53]

Augustine wrote his other major work, the *City of God*, in the shadow of the barbarian invasions, and he challenged the prevailing identification of Rome as a Christian empire. Because the *City of God* distinguished the personal from the political and the sacred from the profane, it had an even more deflating effect on ideas of civic engagement and social reform. Some contemporaries were blaming the new state religion for the empire's failing condition. From Augustine's perspective, such critiques rested on a faulty understanding of the role Christianity could play in human history. Augustine shared with earlier Greek and Roman thinkers the conviction that man is a social being, but he disagreed that reason can guide men toward fulfillment through political life. Even at its best, when a polity finds justice of the sort that Cicero compared with the harmony achieved by musicians, a well-ordered republic cannot escape eventual corruption because of human imperfection.

The inheritance of original sin, Augustine claimed, prevents humans from escaping the propensity to evil. No earthly political order—no city of man, in his terminology—can offer more than a framework of peace and order within which individuals might orient their lives toward salvation. Augustine acknowledged the necessity and legitimacy of political and legal authority in the earthly city and did not recommend against participating in its affairs. He reminded Christians that no success or accomplishments in this life would last. The soul's destination, and thus the proper focus of every Christian, is eternal salvation. The two cities "have issued from two kinds of love. Worldly society has flowered from a selfish love which dared to despise even God, whereas the communion of saints is rooted in a love of God that is ready to trample on self." Whereas those in the city of man long for fame and material success, and "both the rulers themselves and the people they dominate are dominated by the lust for domination," in the City of God "all citizens serve one another in charity, whether they serve by the responsibilities of office or by the duties of obedience." Augustine judged the classical norm of honor merely the sin of pride; in its place he recommended the Christian virtue of humility.[54] Augustine's *City of God* was interpreted as a warning

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against placing too much hope in the possibilities of political activity and against the illusion that politics could ever be sanctified.

Augustine insisted that man could do nothing to merit a heavenly reward without divine grace. Against those Christian writers who had highlighted the role of individual free choice in earning salvation, an emphasis that could authorize active engagement in the world in order to bring into being Christ's ethic of love, Augustine stressed the grace of God. His dismissal of earthly things, and his emphasis on the relative insignificance of the physical world and human institutions compared with salvation, fed the later rise of the medieval monastic ideal of isolation from the corruptions of this life. Some early Christians considered political or social action the proper way to bring the kingdom of God and the earthly city closer together. Others judged such work a distraction from the proper focus on the soul's salvation. Augustine contended that the "wayfaring" community of Christians invited "citizens from all nations and all tongues" and united them "into a single band" rather than allowing them to continue to form themselves into diverse communities.[55] The church on earth should be one church, professing obedience to a single authoritative doctrine. Most Christians soon came to agree with Augustine that in the "earthly city" of politics perfection was impossible; no more could be achieved than "a kind of compromise between human wills about the things relevant to moral life."[56]

For the history of democracy, the effect of Augustine's writings is difficult to exaggerate. Combined with an authoritarian hierarchy that became sacralized and increasingly distinct from the laity, Augustine's writings helped blunt the revolutionary implications of Christianity. Although selfless love and the universal brotherhood of man remained its central ideals, theological and ecclesiastical developments obscured that democratic potential for nearly a thousand years.

Rome's disintegration left Europe in political chaos. Rulers great and small ruled as they saw fit, fending off challenges by other kingdoms or principalities, or from their own subjects, by consent if possible and by force if necessary. When their prerogatives were questioned, kings and princes conferred with the most powerful of their subjects; popes convened councils of cardinals. The German duchies elected a king in 911 and, in 962, designated him the Holy Roman Emperor. That emperor, however, managed to exert little authority over those ostensibly under his rule. In 1220 he conceded that he governed a confederation of effectively autonomous principalities, in which ecclesiastical princes ruled their own territories and secular princes established free cities, some of which combined to form the Hanseatic League.

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The Golden Bull of 1356 not only sealed the authority of imperial electors to select the emperor but also secured their power in their own lands. In the duchies, assemblies of clergy, nobles, and townsmen constituted the Estates General, which could be convened only by the ecclesiastical or secular princes and met irregularly. Gradually this motley array coalesced into an assembly, the Imperial Diet, which brought together imperial electors, princes, and prominent townsmen, and an Imperial Governing Council, which existed briefly in the early sixteenth century. Neither diet nor council succeeded in bringing effectual authority, let alone order, to the crazy quilt of the German states. The French king Philip IV called an assembly of the three estates of his realm, clergy, nobility, and bourgeoisie, in 1302, but the Estates General did not become an effective force in the French monarchy as a result. It served primarily to ratify, not to challenge, the king's will, particularly concerning taxation. As was true in the Holy Roman Empire, only Philip's handpicked counselors, laws already in existence, and long-standing customs hemmed in the ruler's power. Authority was exercised from the top down.[57]

Such assemblies existed in England from the ninth century onward, and the legitimacy of the legislation passed—and of the judicial decisions reached—derived from the authority those assemblies shared with the monarch. Eadred succeeded his brother Edward as king in 946 "by the election of the nobles," including those from Wales and Scandinavia. Between that date and the return from exile of Edward the Confessor in 1041, the significance of the assembly's consent was sufficiently well established that Edward could become king only after he agreed to the terms laid down by the assembled nobles. The Norman rule of William interrupted that practice after 1066, but the crown's fiscal needs prompted renewed consultation with those whose compliance was required. Once King John signed the Magna Carta in 1215, the enduring institution of Parliament emerged from the models provided by the earlier assemblies and councils. The English aristocracy made increasing use of the bolstering phrase "vox populi" when asserting the rights of Englishmen in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Parliament's approval was required for all taxes sought by the king, and it became an increasingly popular forum for focusing attention on grievances expressed in popular petitions. Even though the authority of Parliament remained constrained by royal prerogatives, the converse also held true. For ordinary Englishmen, as for the subjects of kings and princes elsewhere in Europe, popular sovereignty remained an abstraction. The very existence of the Imperial Diet and Council in the German states, the Estates General in France, and especially the rising authority of Parliament in England, however, did provide the com-

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mon people with at least nominal representation in public affairs, and on that foundation far more ambitious claims would arise.[58]

The idea that citizens could play an active part in politics all but disappeared following the fall of Rome. When it returned during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it emerged alongside various civic and economic institutions that were habitually understood within an overarching religious cosmology. These included the first self-governing towns since the ancient world, medieval craft guilds, confraternities, and other voluntary associations that stressed the importance of subordinating the self to the whole. Whereas Medieval Latin was rich with terms concerning community, society, mutuality, and the common good, there was no word for "individual." The notion of a person existing outside the boundaries of multiple communities, rank-ordered from the universal church through various civic and economic groups, was unknown, even though ways of asserting legal claims against other individuals as well as associations were beginning to develop.[59]

Neither late-medieval political theory nor practice seemed likely to provide fertile soil for democracy. As papal authority expanded in the temporal realm ostensibly relegated to insignificance by *The City of God*, so did arguments justifying its power. From the time that Pope Leo IX (1049–54) proclaimed on rickety grounds the "imperial power and dignity" ostensibly ceded by Constantine to the pope, the papacy claimed increasingly comprehensive authority in the secular as well as the religious sphere.[60] From the very heart of that culture, however, the monastic communities most completely separated from public life and most completely devoted to the ideals of self-abnegation and obedience, emerged ideas that would eventually culminate in new ways of thinking about government.

The monks responsible for copying ancient Greek texts and translating them into Latin were venturing into dangerous territory. Gregory IX (1227–41) prohibited the study of the pagan Aristotle until his texts had been "examined and purified." That delicate task fell to the trustworthy Dominican Friars. William of Moerbeke, in Flanders, and Albert the Great and his student Thomas Aquinas, in Paris, undertook the translation of Aristotle's works and unwittingly began the process of transforming European thought. William of Moerbeke, responsible for translating Aristotle's *Politics*, is generally credited with having coined the Latin words *democratia* and *politizare* as a way of making sense of Greek ideas for which there were no Latin equivalents in use when he completed his translation in 1260. The latter verb meant "to take an active part in public affairs," or "to act as a citizen." From that point on, Western Europeans had at least the terminology for envisioning public life outside the framework of Church authority.[61]

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Of course, not everyone greeted the new vocabulary of *democratia* and *politizare* with enthusiasm. After all, Aristotle had described democracy as a corrupt form of government. In the writings of Aquinas (1224–74), the division between the earthly and heavenly cities of Augustine vanished in the triumphant declaration of universal natural law governing all states and their ultimate subservience to the authority of God's church. Consistent with his aim of integrating Aristotle's philosophy with Christian theology, Aquinas praised the mixed constitution that incorporated monarch, aristocracy, and people. Aquinas made clear that an ideal citizen, rational and virtuous, must also strive to be an ideal Christian, obedient to divinely ordained natural law. Consequently Aquinas savaged the idea that the people themselves could constitute legitimate authority. In his book *On Princely Government* (1270), Aquinas declared that "a government is called a democracy when it is iniquitous, and when it is carried on by a large number of people." It is "a form of popular power in which the common people, by sheer force of numbers, oppress the rich, with the result that the whole populace becomes a kind of tyrant."[62] That argument clearly echoed the most pessimistic classical Greek and Roman writers' worries about the poor and vicious masses unjustly despoiling the wealthy and worthy few. Moreover, it nailed down the scholastic conception of authority descending from God to the "vicar of Christ," as popes had taken to calling themselves. There had once been an alternative model. Some early Church fathers conceived of authority as ascending from the scattered communities of early Christians to the bishops, and from them to the "servant of the servants of God," in the words of Pope Gregory the Great (590–604). After Gregory, however, that model of authority ascending from its foundation in the people all but vanished in Christian Europe.[63]

Challenges to the descending conception of authority began to emerge in the late thirteenth century. Writers such as Brunetto Latini, John of Paris, Bartolus of Sassoferrato, Ptolemy of Lucca, and especially Marsilius of Padua (1275–1342) rehabilitated the classical ideal of mixed government and began to envision legitimate forms of popular political engagement, albeit almost always within the frameworks of monarchical and papal power. Their writings offered early glimpses of a conception of popular sovereignty grounded on an ethic of reciprocity. All of them offered the Christian virtue of *caritas*, loving others above oneself, as the essential quality of social life. Without it, humans gravitated toward sinful self-centeredness. With it, according to Henry of Ghent, "men living together in civil society and community" might aspire to living as God intended: "bound together by supreme friendship, in which each considered the other as a second self, by supreme charity, by which each of them loved the other as himself, and by supreme benevolence,

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by which each of them wished for the other what he wished for himself."[64] Marsilius produced *Defender of the Peace*, the most influential of these writings, on behalf of the Northern Italian city-states, such as his native Padua, which were struggling to establish their independence from the papacy. Aquinas had claimed that the people, in principle originally sovereign, alienated that sovereignty when they delegated authority to a ruler. His critics countered that, in the words of Marsilius, "the elected kind of government is superior to the non-elected," and "the ultimate legislator in any well-ordered community must be the people or the whole body of citizens." Marsilius was launching a conceptual revolution.[65]

Challenges to the model of authority descending from God through the pope did not occur in a vacuum. Writers such as Marsilius deliberately invoked the early communities of Christians, governing themselves without central authority. They looked to the precedent of self-governing monastic communities such as the Cistercians. They also cited the practice of their own day, when various local organizations operating within communes, and the communes themselves, demonstrated the value of at least a measure of self-government de facto even though they might lack the formal authority de jure to legitimate that practice. Feudal relationships depended on mutual obligations. Almost all persons in England after 1066, in the northern parts of France, and to a lesser degree in the Italian city-states and the German territories, experienced such bonds in both directions, linking them to those to whom they owed fealty, and to others who owed them fealty. When those bonds were tight and responsibilities clear, the chain of obligations prevented the emergence of a clearly articulated theory of popular sovereignty. When the feudal order began to break down, however, and when newly emerging communities of various kinds began to employ the Aristotelian idea of a natural civic order independent of (even if consistent with) the spiritual order, as in the Padua of Marsilius and the Lucca of Ptolemy, then asserting the sovereign authority of the people became not only a plausible but also an attractive strategy to employ against the prevailing authority of monarch and pope.

In practice, democracy still had limited allure. Most of those who made the arguments for popular sovereignty in Italian city-states such as Padua, Lucca, and Florence had in mind empowering aristocrats against kings, or against the imperial papacy, rather than engaging the masses directly in politics. Although Marsilius elicited positive responses from critics of papal ambition, republican governments in Renaissance city-states remained oligarchic, and none enjoyed long-term stability. In the early years of the Italian communes, fear of factional strife led some communities in the eleventh and twelfth centuries to experiment

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with sortition or the use of indirect election. Fourteenth-century Florentine oligarchs appointed diplomats and military leaders, but Florence relied on a lottery to select magistrates. In his *History of the Florentine People* (1415–21), Leonardo Bruni challenged the logic of random selection by emphasizing that elections require candidates to put their "reputation on the line," an incentive missing when officials are chosen by lot. When the Medici seized power in 1434, Florence maintained the façade of republican rule beneath the reality of oligarchy, a disguise preferred by most of the Italian city-states that proudly declared themselves republics. After the revolution of 1494 ended Medici rule, the charismatic populist reformer Fra Girolamo Savonarola instituted a Great Council of nearly 3,400 citizens responsible for legislation and choosing magistrates. But Savonarola overplayed his hand, lost his popular support, and found himself arrested and executed as an enemy of the republic he sought to save from the threat posed by wealthy families.

Humanists such as Niccolò Machiavelli and Francesco Guicciardini split over the appropriate allocation of authority and the appropriate means of governing Florence, and their disagreements were echoed in other Italian city-states. Machiavelli was unusual among humanists not only because his *Prince* recommended the cynical manipulation of power but also because his (until recently) less well known *Discourses on Livy* and *Florentine Histories* presented stinging critiques of the oligarchies that controlled most so-called republics. Machiavelli applauded plebeian resistance in Roman and in Florentine politics and railed against ruling families' use of republican rhetoric to mask their abuses of power. Whereas Machiavelli championed lotteries and citizen juries to balance the power of wealth, Guicciardini, like Bruni, preferred to leave power in the hands of a smaller number of wise and virtuous public officials, whom they judged better able to discern the common good than were the people themselves.[66] Inventing Latin words for "democracy" and "political participation" was only a first step down a long road toward making that activity real for more than a few members of the most privileged segments of the population of Europe.

The Protestant Reformation fed democracy in two different ways. First, Protestants downplayed the role of the clergy and implicitly or explicitly challenged the prerogatives of hierarchies ostensibly authorized by divine authority. Second, Protestants emphasized the sacred dimension of ordinary life, the divine spark in every human that made possible, for God's elect, a life of sainthood in secular as well as religious callings. That vision of everyday life justified trusting the judgment of ordinary people as much as that of their supposed betters, whether in the clergy or, by extension, in the aristoc-

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racy. Within some religious communities, that confidence in the capacity of the people eventually manifested itself in a new commitment to the possibility of self-governing political bodies as well.

The tension between religious devotion turning into intolerant zealotry, as in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century wars of religion, and religious devotion justifying popular government by providing the rationale for seeing the will of the people as the will of God has been a persistent feature of modern democracy. Accounts of democracy that treat it primarily as an economic struggle, a war between oppressed classes yearning for equality and elites trying to maintain their status, like accounts that focus exclusively on the struggle of individuals to attain and defend their rights to liberty and property against oppressive state power, overlook the independent significance of this crucial religious dynamic. Religious issues have persisted at the center of democratic discourse over the last four centuries.

Democracy emerged not only due to revulsion against religious fanaticism. It derived just as much from the revaluations of everyday life and of ordinary people's capacity to lead virtuous lives and exercise judgment responsibly. It is usually taken for granted that the Protestant Reformation advanced the cause of democracy, a truism that masks the more complicated dynamic at work in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Challenges to the authority of Rome obviously eroded papal authority. Those challenges sparked religious wars that not only delayed the emergence of popular government by inadvertently ushering in royal absolutism but also left a poisonous deposit of hatred in the cultures of northern Europe. Establishing—or even reestablishing—an ethic of reciprocity in the aftermath of civil war has proven exceedingly difficult.

By the time *Defender of the Peace* was condemned as heretical in 1327, the papacy itself was widely considered a scandal. In the *Inferno* Dante included a number of popes and lesser clerics among those souls burning in hell. Some observers began to combine critiques of Church practices with critiques of the culture that both nourished such corruption and excused it.[67] Philology, which Renaissance humanists employed to pry open ancient texts and breathe life into medieval thought, provided unexpected leverage for that more radical project. The fifteenth-century Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla exposed the forgery behind the Donation of Constantine by demonstrating that, because it contained words unknown in classical Rome, it must have been written at least several centuries after Constantine's death. Taken as a whole, the inquiries of Renaissance philologists served to erode grander claims for a unity of truth and authority, and to suggest that all beliefs are specific to particular times and cultures. Although that historicist framework

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did not shatter the Christian faith of all humanists, combined with the recovery of ancient texts it provided a position from which to launch far-reaching social, political, and religious challenges to prevailing practices.

Two of the most influential of those critiques helped unsettle prevailing ideas about political authority. Written by two good friends, these books appeared in the same year, 1516, but in strikingly different rhetorical modes. The *Institutio principis christiani*, written by Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, took the form of a sober advice book for the young Hapsburg monarch Charles V. Thomas More's *Utopia* used early reports from the New World as a pretext for a satirical attack on the England of his day and the pretensions of those who would advise princes. Both books manifested their authors' commitment to braiding political ideas drawn from the pagan classics with the moral precepts of Christianity. Neither Erasmus nor More shared the pessimism that some of their contemporaries derived from the writings of Augustine and others derived from the evidence of widespread corruption in the realms of church and state. Both invoked republican civic virtue and Christian brotherhood to advance an ideal of good government conceived as the pursuit of social justice rather than privilege.

More had the citizens of Utopia choose their magistrates democratically. All political decisions in Utopia emerge from careful deliberation because the Utopians "know that through a perverse and preposterous pride a man may prefer to sacrifice the common good to his own hasty opinions." More's Utopians pledge themselves to an ethical code that, although not explicitly Christian, bears an uncanny resemblance to More's and Erasmus's own efforts—and to the ethical ideas Montaigne would later advance in his *Essays*—to fuse sacred scripture with elements from Epicurean and Stoic moral philosophy. Utopians wisely "never discuss happiness without combining the rational principles of philosophy with principles taken from religion," an amalgam that produces something quite different from the medieval monastic ideal. "The Utopians do not believe that there is happiness in all pleasures, but only in good and honest pleasures. To such, they believe, our nature is drawn as to its highest good by virtue itself."

More's Utopians can choose their government officials wisely because they will what is good. Rather than distrusting all pleasure, as Christian ascetics did, or glorying only in the pitiless hauteur of classical or Renaissance nobles, the Utopians instead take delight in "those appetites to which nature leads us," that is, "only to the delights approved by right reason." They realize, more clearly than did More's own contemporaries, that if minimizing pain for others is a legitimate goal, then minimizing pain for oneself is equally legitimate. More's understanding of what constitutes "natural" virtue was, as Montaigne's

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was to be, as decisively shaped by reports of American Indian cultures as it was by his disaffection from the Italian civic humanist ideal of mastering fortune or the monastic ideal of self-abnegation. The most notorious dimensions of More's *Utopia*, its communal living arrangements and the absence of private property, manifested More's conviction regarding the desirability of equal access to—and the sensible use rather than immoderate accumulation of—the goods of the world, not their renunciation. Like his friend Erasmus, More used his learning to unsettle the assumptions of those comfortable with their own privileges. The Utopians deemed "basically unjust" any society in which those who did the most important work endured poverty to sustain the luxury of those who did not work. Such arrangements—typical of all European cultures of More's day—survived only because of what he called "a conspiracy of the rich."[68]

As explosive as More's social critique was his commitment to self-government. The citizens of Utopia not only elected their public officials, whom he called "phylarchs"; they also elected their priests. Every twenty households elected a representative to a one-year term, which ensured rotation of office and wide participation in public affairs. Those elected then chose a smaller group, one from every group of ten phylarchs, and this council chose a prince who ruled for life—unless he turned tyrant, in which case he could be deposed. By locating political power in the people of Utopia, More challenged the monarchical ideal that prevailed not only in England but in most of Europe. Even though *Utopia* concluded with the character called "More" dismissing its central ideas as a fantasy rendered impossible by human pride and the ubiquitous yearning for "nobility, magnificence, splendor, and majesty," the book nevertheless signaled the radical implications of ideas being entertained by humanists such as More and Erasmus.[69]

Among those who corresponded with Erasmus was Martin Luther, a young Augustinian monk at the University of Wittenberg whose intense piety would unleash utopian passions and spark murderous wars of religion that transformed European history. Luther had trained in the law before a lightning strike inspired him to dedicate his life to serving God. Luther admired Erasmus's writings and shared his disgust with the corrupt condition of the Church. In 1517, one year after the publication of More's *Utopia* and Erasmus's Greek translation of the New Testament, Luther carried his protest further than did any other Renaissance humanists. First, he charged that by minimizing the importance of the Bible and stressing the writings of Church fathers, the papacy was leading Christians away from God's own word. Second, the Church was corrupting the sacraments not only by putting them up for sale but also, and even more fundamentally, by claiming that they played any

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part in saving sinners from damnation. Third, Church authorities, losing sight of the central truths of revelation (and of Augustine's theology), were encouraging Catholics in the mistaken belief that their own righteousness, exhibited in good works, could earn their souls' salvation. Scripture, repentance, grace, and faith, Luther charged in the Ninety-Five Theses he posted in Wittenberg, not the forms of intercession provided by clergy, sacraments, indulgences, or works, lay at the heart of Christianity. By challenging the role of the Catholic hierarchy and endorsing "the priesthood of all believers," Luther seemed to undercut the legitimacy of all established authority and to suggest, at least implicitly, government by the people. Luther urged German princes to shrug off the papacy's illegitimate pretensions to power and assume responsibility for purifying religious practice in their own territories. Although he considered himself a loyal Catholic calling his church back to its animating ideals, Luther was excommunicated by the pope and declared an outlaw by the Hapsburg emperor Charles V.

Various complaints about the power of feudal lords and against the abuses of the clergy fueled radical criticism of social and political arrangements as well as religious orthodoxy.[70] The most systematic statement of these grievances, bearing the innocuous title *Twelve Articles*, circulated in southwestern Germany during the peasants' rebellion of 1524–25. Attempting to leverage support for Luther in his dispute against Rome, insurgent peasants clamored to appoint their own ministers and determine their pay.[71] In short, they were demanding autonomy and equality within the boundaries revealed in scripture as God's law. Champions of these revolts thought they saw in Luther an ally who could help mobilize support for ordinary people against the privileges and authority of the nobility. Luther disagreed. He clarified his own belief in an absolute distinction between the inner, spiritual life and the outer, temporal life. In his *Friendly Admonition to Peace concerning the Twelve Articles of the Swabian Peasants* (1525), Luther argued that the Bible commands obedience rather than liberation. By then hundreds of thousands were taking up arms throughout the German states. The most visible of the rebel leaders, Thomas Müntzer, challenged the feudal lords and Catholic clergy of Thuringia, at the heart of central Europe. In the decisive battle of May 15, 1525, his army of peasants, miners, textile workers, and religious enthusiasts was routed by the artillery of the dukes of Saxony and Brunswick. Müntzer himself was beheaded.

In the months that followed, tens of thousands who had rallied to the peasants' cause were put to death in the German states. Luther approved of the massacres as the only way to end rebellion and restore order, without which no Christian life is possible. Luther had warned the princes and lords

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facing rebellious peasants to "try kindness first" so as not to "strike a spark that will kindle all Germany and that no one can quench."[72] The savagery of the early sixteenth-century peasants' revolts—and the savagery of their suppression—fulfilled Luther's worst fears. They marked the beginning of a deadly age of warfare that not only infected German culture but also decisively transformed religion and politics all over Europe.

Unlike Luther, who denied that his challenge to religious authority implied a challenge to secular authority, many of the reformers inspired by his defiance of papal supremacy tried to work out the political implications of challenging Rome. Huldrych Zwingli, in Zurich, and Jean Calvin, in Geneva, thought the political consequences of the Copernican revolution meant rethinking the Christian responsibilities of civil authorities and the civic responsibilities of Christians. Zwingli contended that the division between magistrates and clergy could be healed if both followed the word of Christ: "The Christian is nothing else than the faithful and good citizen, and the Christian city is nothing other than the Christian Church."[73]

The contributions of Calvinism to democracy have long been acknowledged, but the irony of the outcome has attracted less attention. Calvin shared Luther's conviction that each Christian has unmediated access, through free inquiry in the Bible, to the word of God. He likewise embraced the idea that all humans are subject to the sovereign will of the almighty. Those principles might seem to translate without too much difficulty into the ideas of liberty and equality. The translation is complex, however, and not only because the doctrine of predestination—usually considered the central contribution of Calvin to Protestantism—seems inconsistent with any concept of self-determination, whether for individuals or the people as a whole. Calvin fled his native Paris for Basel after one of his friends was burned at the stake for heresy in 1535. The following year he completed the single most influential text of the Reformation, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which he continued to revise until four years before his death in 1564. In 1536 Calvin arrived in Geneva, which became a Protestant town that year by virtue of a vote by all the adult male citizens. So fervently did Calvin assert the independence of the reformed clergy that he was banished from the city two years later.

Calvin showed greater restraint when he returned to Geneva in 1541, and that strategy worked. In his writings and in later editions of his *Institutes*, Calvin proclaimed the supremacy of civil authority and invoked "Christian liberty" less frequently than "Godly discipline." In the final edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin elaborated on a divinely appointed "two-fold government," operating in the civic and ecclesiastical realms, with secular and church officials coordinating to provide moral and religious guidance and discipline while

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nevertheless remaining independent of each other. Following Luther's logic, Calvin counseled Christians not to rebel as individuals against unjust authority. He invoked the example of Spartan, Athenian, and Roman assemblies to show how the people could stand up to tyrants, and his followers were to cite those passages when they asserted the legitimacy of resistance.

Such arguments also emerged in sixteenth-century England, where a form of Protestantism became the official state religion in the 1530s as a result of royal initiative and parliamentary decree rather than popular agitation. Henry VIII, previously proclaimed "Defender of the Faith" by Pope Leo X for his denunciation of Luther, led England away from Rome in order to legitimate his divorce and the heir he expected from his second marriage in 1533. The king's lord chancellor, Thomas More, who had criticized the abuses of the Catholic Church and portrayed the happy consequences of religious toleration in his *Utopia*, in the 1520s had nevertheless proven himself a passionate foe of Lutheran heretics. After Henry's remarriage, the hunters became the hunted: More and dozens of other Catholic resisters died martyrs' deaths.

The tide turned again when Henry's oldest daughter, the Catholic Mary Tudor, took the throne after Henry's son (by his third wife) died. Mary restored Catholicism, executed several bishops who had done her father's will—along with almost three hundred ordinary people who had cheered them on—and sent hundreds more scurrying into exile. Among those were John Ponet, John Knox, and Christopher Goodman, radical Calvinists who adapted the arguments of sixteenth-century conciliarism to their own cause. Knox and Goodman escaped to Geneva, and Calvin urged the fiery Goodman to stay after Knox invited Goodman to join his Calvinist community in Edinburgh. Goodman's tract *How Superior Powers Ought to Be Obeyed by Their Subjects: And Wherein They May Be Lawfully Disobeyed and Resisted* (1558) made clear the potentially democratic implications of the idea of the covenant. Goodman reasoned that just as the early Christians had to redeem the covenant from the Jews, so now God's people must redeem it from papists. Goodman acknowledged the multiple admonitions to obedience in the Christian scriptures. He condemned the "Anabaptists and Libertines" who took the law into their own hands. As the Hebrew prophets counseled Israel to endure captivity and oppression, so Paul and Peter instructed the early Christians to follow Christ's own example. God's people now faced a different challenge. As God delivered Israel from bondage, and as redemption came through the death of Christ, now the covenant required the "Church of God" to resist the Antichrist in its papist form and restore God's rule.[74]

After only five years on the English throne, Queen Mary died in 1558, the same year Goodman's tract appeared, and the status enjoyed by the Church of

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England was restored by Mary's half sister, Elizabeth. Although Mary's efforts to suppress Protestantism had been short-lived, she had sown seeds of bitterness. The rage that seethed through texts such as Goodman's would find different forms of expression in the violence of the English Civil War, in the death of Charles I, and in the busy little towns set up by Puritans in New England. Alive, Müntzer, More, and the Marian martyrs had little in common. Their executions transformed mistrust into hatred.

Bloody struggles between Catholics and Lutherans in the German states continued until 1555, when the Peace of Augsburg authorized nobles to determine the religious faith of their subjects. This arrangement, the end of a sequence originating with Luther's declaration of independence for the conscience of each individual believer, brought religious faith firmly under control of the nobility. The treaty nevertheless accomplished one of the principal aims of the *Twelve Articles*. To avoid massacres, Lutheran princes were instructed to allow their Catholic subjects to emigrate to territories where they could practice their faith; Catholic princes were to permit Lutherans to do the same. Such uprootings were painful, as were the conversions of convenience that enabled people to stay put and survive. The Peace of Augsburg, even as it tightened the control of princes over their people's religious practices, unexpectedly loosened some other bonds as the price of the peace it secured.

As the population shifts prompted by the Augsburg settlement slowed in the German states, tensions between Protestants and Catholics in France intensified. The conflict reached a crescendo in the days after August 25, 1572, when the violence originating in the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre of Huguenots in Paris culminated in the deaths of thousands of Protestants throughout France. From that moment on, murders, assassinations, and pitched battles between massed armies alternated with lawless raiding expeditions that terrorized populations caught in the crossfire, permanently defaced French abbeys and cathedrals, and—as we've seen—more than once nearly cost Montaigne his life. At the height of the violence in France, a series of books appeared extending the Calvinist argument for resistance and legitimating the formation of armies devoted to overthrowing a tyrannical monarch. These arguments took different forms. One proceeded on the basis of history: the early Frankish monarchy attained legitimacy only because all components of the culture authorized it. From this perspective, the Estates General was only the most recent in a long tradition of public assemblies. A second form of argument, revealing a clear debt to the 1560 edition of Calvin's *Institutes* and parallels with Goodman's incendiary tract, counterposed the authority of God to the authority of tyrants. The third, exemplified by

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Philippe Duplessis-Mornay's *Vindiciae contra tyrannos* (1579), made even more radical claims.

Vindiciae contra tyrannos, which appeared in eleven Latin editions and was translated into French and English, surpassed the most controversial of Calvin's formulations to contend that all monarchy rests on popular consent. Because the greatest of kings remain but God's vassals, public officials not only may but also have a duty to challenge tyrants who flout divine law. The people unrestrained may be likened to "a raging beast," yet in extreme circumstances, when usurpers disregard the constitutive social traditions that undergird all authority, "even the least of the people" may legitimately resist tyranny.[75] In these successive contributions to public debate, the initial complaints of Luther and Calvin about the corrupt papacy all but vanished. In their place stood versions of the principle of popular sovereignty. By such circuitous routes did the initial proclamations of free inquiry and the challenges to clerical authority culminate in spirited assertions of popular government.

In France those arguments were drowned out by the din of war and demands that it should cease. Huguenot aristocrats, lawyers, and merchants consolidated control over walled towns in the more or less autonomous regions on the periphery of France. From those strongholds they fought fierce battles against Catholic forces. As in the German states, economic issues were a factor in these struggles, yet only religious convictions can explain the fury of these wars or the willingness of Catholics and Protestants to die for their faith.

Given the exhaustion and fears of anarchy elicited by such carnage, the idea of trusting the people to bring peace seemed a fantasy. More influential than the Calvinist tracts urging popular resistance was Jean Bodin's *The Six Books of the Republic* (1576), which likened a republic to a family. Just as a family is most stable when the patriarch exercises absolute authority, Bodin argued, so absolute rule by the monarch offers the best means to the universally desired end of tranquility. Bodin took direct aim at both the Aristotelian and Polybian arguments for mixed government. He drew a distinction, which was to prove widely influential, between states and governments. A state, he contended, could be monarchical, aristocratic, or democratic. Bodin classified the republics of ancient Rome and contemporary Geneva as democratic states because the ultimate authority resided with the body of the people. State sovereignty could not be divided, as government or administration could be—and indeed in most regimes had been. Rome, for example, combined quasi-monarchical forms of executive authority with an aristocratic senate and a plebeian assembly. For Bodin, sovereignty remained unitary regardless of the forms of government: "To institute the dominion of one, together with that of the few, and also with that of the many, simultaneously,"

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is not only impossible but unimaginable: "sovereignty is by its nature indivisible."[76] Regardless of the administrative forms adopted, ultimate authority had to reside with the monarch, the nobility, or the people. The wars of religion showed why patriarchal states such as those of Europe relied on monarchical government: the alternative was chaos. When state sovereignty, Bodin concluded, resides in the king's will, the king is answerable only to God. Bodin helped inaugurate a tradition of arguments justifying royal absolutism that would dominate seventeenth-century political discourse throughout the Atlantic world. After a century of furious struggle, the idea of popular sovereignty seemed consigned to the margins of European thought.

By the early seventeenth century, democracy had few friends. Models of more or less popular or representative government were familiar from classical Greece, the Roman republic, and some late-medieval and Renaissance city-states. Arguments for liberty and against monarchy and hierarchy descended from those sources and from themes present in the writings of the Hebrew Bible, the Christian scriptures, and Protestant resistance theory. To understand why none of the roads leading toward democracy was taken before the seventeenth century, we must return to Montaigne's château.

Montaigne and other humanists had learned from classical thinkers—and from the example of American Indians—the appeal of autonomy and equality for all citizens. Montaigne had learned from his own experience, and the simple fact that he had lived to recount it, the appeal of an ethic of reciprocity. He placed those values within the framework of his watchwords uncertainty and restraint. The French wars of religion convinced him that because ordinary people had shown themselves incapable of doubting dogmas or restraining themselves, the values of deliberation, pluralism, and reciprocity could survive only if peace were restored by obedience to custom and established authority. The alternative was savagery worse than cannibalism. Attractive as civic and religious virtues were in the abstract, war rendered them irrelevant.[77]

The consequences of the Reformation and the wars of religion thus proved doubly ironic. In the short run they contributed to the rise of royal absolutism and deepened the distrust of the people whose revolts against authority took such destructive turns, a dynamic that delayed the emergence of democratic governments. In the longer run, the effect was as profoundly transformative as it was unanticipated. Because the violence of religious warfare showed the dangers of religious dogmatism, thinkers such as Montaigne and his successors began to contemplate a world in which uncertainty replaced certainty. Among earlier worldviews, however, were not only those that had undergirded the deeply hierarchical cultures of feudalism and sustained the

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royal absolutism of the seventeenth century. Equally important in the long run were those that had animated rabbis such as Hillel, the communities of early Christians, and the mendicant friars who cherished ideals of benevolence that challenged prevailing medieval patterns of thought and behavior. Montaigne's understandable revulsion against cruelty seeped into European culture as an aversion to all efforts to unify religious belief and political practice, which in time led skeptics to distrust faith and believers to distrust skeptics. The wars of religion ended with a truce, which seemed to silence calls for popular government yet eventually ushered in democratic cultures that displaced absolutism. When religious and political pluralists at last vanquished absolutists, however, among the casualties were the religious underpinnings of the golden rule, the ideal that had made possible the emergence of the ethic of reciprocity on which democracy depends.[78]

In the aftermath of the voyages of exploration and the wars of religion, violence cast a dark shadow over the idea of democracy. Despite lingering awareness of scattered experiments with popular government in the ancient world, and despite hints of alternatives to absolutism ranging from the practices of American Indian cultures to the ideas advanced by resistance theorists, very few Europeans in the early seventeenth century were thinking seriously about government by the people. Only when English settlers began arriving in the North American colonies were the first, albeit unintended, steps taken toward the emergence of democratic cultures in the modern North Atlantic world. Small and tentative as such steps were, they had lasting consequences.

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CHAPTER 2

Voices in the Wilderness

Democracies in North America

When William Dyer gathered with other English settlers on an island in Narragansett Bay in the late winter of 1641, icy winds chilled his fingers. Meeting in Patuxit (now Portsmouth, Rhode Island), the group commissioned Dyer to record their judgments: "It is ordered and unanimously agreed upon, that the Government which this Bodie Politick doth attend unto this Island, and the Jurisdiction thereof, in favour of our Prince is a DEMOCRACIE, or Popular Government." How could these men in the same breath characterize their government as a democracy and acknowledge the authority of their "Prince," the English king Charles I?

This chapter explores that question by focusing on how and why English colonists transformed the abstract idea of popular sovereignty into practices of self-government. "It is in the Power of the Body of Freemen orderly assembled," Dyer and his associates continued, "or the major part of them, to make or constitute Just Lawes, by which they will be regulated, and to depute from among themselves such Ministers as shall see them faithfully executed between Man and Man." As their motto, the settlers chose "*Amor vincit omnia*," love conquers all. After reporting decisions concerning the bounty on foxes and the killing of deer, and the resolution of disputes over property and debts, the group ordered that the people, "being lawfully assembled at the place and hour appointed, shall have full Powre to transact the business that shall be Presented" so long as the majority, "the Major part of the Body entire," participates. Finally, "such acts concluded and issued [shall] be of as full authority as if there were all present."[1] With those few words, the often-squabbling residents of fledgling towns of Newport and Portsmouth, situated at opposite ends of Aquidneck Island, constituted themselves a single representative

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democracy with laws to be made by the people. They did not renounce the English monarchy. They simply did not expect the king or Parliament to play a role in their civic affairs. They would govern themselves.

The formal declaration recorded by William Dyer made explicit the democratic thrust of compacts made in communities throughout New England after the colonies of Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay were established in 1620 and 1629. The sovereign people gathered together to make just laws, which they authorized their chosen officials to administer. As a result of their mutual love, and with God's help, they would survive the hardships they faced—if they didn't tear each other apart, or antagonize the Indians on whose forbearance their settlements depended. Compared with the world they left behind in England, a world of monarchy, dependency, and inherited status, the world these New Englanders made for themselves in America was marked by greater popular participation in government and relatively greater autonomy and equality.

That transition was anything but straightforward. Consider the gathering in Patuxit. William Dyer had abandoned his life as a prosperous London merchant and sailed with his wife, Mary, to join the Massachusetts Puritans in 1635. His family emigrated from Boston because Mary sympathized with her close friend Anne Hutchinson and their minister, John Wheelwright, both of whom had been banished by Massachusetts governor John Winthrop. After Mary Dyer walked out of church with Hutchinson, her stillborn child was exhumed and declared a "monstrous" example of the fruits of heresy. Two decades after her husband had helped establish the "DEMOCRACIE" of Patuxit, Mary Dyer was hanged when she returned to Puritan Massachusetts as an unrepentant and defiant Quaker.[2]

The less dramatic conflict between Mary Dyer's nemesis, John Winthrop, and another unorthodox Puritan, Roger Williams, brings into focus the challenge of reconciling popular sovereignty with autonomy. Williams left England with his wife and child in December of 1630, just six months after Winthrop's ship, the *Arbella*, had landed in New England. Williams was a precocious student and a brilliant linguist. He read law with the leading jurist of his day, Sir Edward Coke. As a boy he learned Dutch from neighbors in London and earned entry to Peterhouse College, Cambridge, by virtue of Coke's sponsorship and Williams's early mastery of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. While training for the ministry in Cambridge, Williams gravitated toward the Puritan dissenters who feared that Catholic sympathizers led by Archbishop William Laud were conspiring to roll back the Reformation. Leaving behind his native England for North America, Williams later wrote, "was bitter as Death to me."[3]

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Winthrop at first admired Williams as a talented and devoted minister, but soon the governor lost patience with the young firebrand. Williams spent two years in the colony of Plymouth, south of Boston, and while there he became acquainted with the Indians nearby. He learned enough about their language and their culture to question the legitimacy of English claims to their land. In 1633 he accepted an offer from the town of Salem to serve as its minister, an invitation that the magistrates of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, already aware of Williams's unconventional ideas, opposed. As Winthrop saw it, the uncompromising Williams then used his Salem pulpit to fan every spark of controversy in the colony, from the veiling of women in church and the presence of a cross on the English flag to the acceptability of using God's name in oaths. Williams went too far, as he had done in Plymouth, when he criticized the king for seizing Indian land. Twice he was called before the General Court and told to recant, which he did, reluctantly, behind closed doors.

Beneath all Williams's objections, however, lay a more fundamental challenge: he denied the state's authority to regulate religious belief. Because so many of the people who knew Williams were "much taken with the apprehension of his godliness," Winthrop wrote, the contagion of dissent might infect other Puritans. The General Court ruled that Williams must be banished.[4] Militia captain John Underhill was ordered to apprehend Williams and ship him across the Atlantic. When a storm prevented Underhill's men from leaving Boston, Winthrop, now no longer governor but still a member of the colony's Court of Assistants, secretly warned Williams that he had three days to escape.[5] Leaving behind his family in Salem—his wife had given birth to a second child, a daughter named Freeborne, only a few months earlier—Williams gathered what few things he could carry, bundled himself against the snow, and headed south.

Venturing into a New England blizzard in January requires courage and strength as well as faith. Alone and on foot, Williams wandered for fourteen weeks before arriving at the headwaters of Narragansett Bay, some sixty miles from Salem, in April of 1636. Seeing the hand of God in his exodus, Williams named the place of his deliverance Providence. Joined that summer by his family and others from Salem and Boston who shared his principles, or at least his uneasiness with Massachusetts, Williams and his neighbors deliberately established a community distinct both from Winthrop's Bay Colony and from the Pilgrims in Plymouth. Williams developed an explicitly religious argument for separating church and state. He reasoned that God inscribed the commandments he gave Moses on two separate tablets because the first four sins—sins against the deity—differed from the other six sins

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against humans. Civil authorities should enforce the latter to preserve order, but sins against God were His alone to judge and to punish. Whereas the magistrates of Massachusetts Bay presumed to regulate the beliefs as well as the behavior of the colony's residents, Williams denied all earthly powers the authority to discipline souls. Contemporaries familiar with the document establishing the government of Providence in 1637 knew that it stipulated the inhabitants would "subject ourselves in active and passive obedience to all such orders or agreements as shall be made for the public good of the body," orders relating only to "civil things," not religious beliefs. Unlike the oppressive theocrats of Massachusetts, Williams is revered as a precocious champion of individual liberty, a pioneer who pointed England's American colonies toward secular, popular government. As usual, such inspiring tales mask a more complicated truth.

The quarrels between Williams and Winthrop demonstrate the Janus face of early American Puritanism. Seventeenth-century New Englanders, who consciously yearned to recapture a world of ancient simplicity and berated themselves as failures, created institutions that irretrievably transformed their culture. The rise of democracy in America, like the creation of its most iconic and influential form, the New England town meeting, is a story of backing into uncharted territory, a story of surprising and unintended consequences rather than heroic trailblazing.

When Williams fled Salem, he placed himself not only in the hands of God but also at the mercy of the Narragansett Indians. Most English colonists took for granted that their Christian king authorized them, as God's designated agents, to occupy Indian lands and convert pagan Indians. Williams rejected that assumption on two grounds. First, he denied that the English king, or the English themselves, could be designated Christians. Only those willing to separate themselves from the corrupt Church of England—the small minority of Puritans called Separatists (like those in Plymouth) or Independents (those in the Bay Colony)—could even approach that lofty status. Second, Williams accepted the Indians' claim to their own lands and insisted that the English could assume dominion only by attaining the Indians' consent. If this double-barreled challenge to the authority of the English kings James and Charles elicited the earliest public censures of Williams, it was his rejection of civil authority in matters of faith that provoked his banishment.

On earth, Williams once wrote, humans are but "poor grasshoppers, hopping and skipping from branch to twig in this vale of tears."[6] When Williams found himself neither hopping nor skipping but slogging and sloshing through a "howling wilderness" covered by deep snow in that brutally cold

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winter of 1636, he stopped first in Plymouth.[7] Officials there, however, remembering the trouble he had caused them and fearful of antagonizing the Massachusetts magistrates who had banished him, warned Williams to keep moving south. When he arrived in Narragansett territory, Williams set out to practice what he had preached to so little effect in Salem and Plymouth, relying on the tool he had acquired earlier, a facility with Indian languages. While lodging with the Wampanoags, in what he called "their filthy, smoakie holes," he had indulged his "Constant Zealous desire to dive into their Native language." That investment now paid off.[8] Defenseless, hungry, and cold, Williams threw himself on the Narragansetts' generosity. He found "even amongst these wild *Americans*," he later wrote, "a savour of *civility* and *courtesie*," which they extended without making distinctions, "both amongst *themselves* and towards *strangers*."[9]

Williams did not romanticize American Indians. He judged them as susceptible to sin as the English and as likely to behave as "barbarous men of blood." When they did resort to violence, he later wrote in 1675, at the height of King Philip's War, they were "as justly repelled and subdued as wolves that assault the sheep," and he was remorseless about punishing those responsible for torching Providence.[10] Williams did not, however, imagine Indians occupying the lower rungs of a ladder reaching from degradation to civilization: "Nature knows no difference between *Europe* and *Americans* in blood, birth, bodies, &c. God having of one blood made all mankind *Acts* 17. and all by nature being children of wrath *Ephes.* 2." From Williams's perspective, unrepentant English Christians were no nearer to God than were unconverted Indians. Williams expressed that conviction in a brief verse addressed to English readers reluctant to reform:

> By nature, wrath's his portion, thine no more,
> Till grace, his soul and thine in Christ restore.
> Make sure thy second birth, else thou shalt see
> Heaven ope to Indians wild, but shut to thee.[11]

The unyielding rigor of Williams's own religious convictions prompted him to treat Indians with as much respect as shown by any English colonist of his generation. Since all people—Puritan as well as Wampanoag or Narragansett—are sinners, he urged the English to adopt an attitude of greater humility in their encounters with the native people of America. Williams confided that he himself had "been in danger of them," and, thanks to God, "delivered yet from them."[12]

Just how did Williams escape danger? First, his reputation as a friend of the Indians preceded him when he headed south. Second, he befriended the

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Narragansett sachem Miantonomo. Finally, he agreed to purchase rather than simply claim the land on which Providence would stand. Overall, he treated the Narragansett with a degree of respect they did not enjoy in their dealings with Plymouth, with Massachusetts, or, later, with Connecticut. In a letter to the unruly settlers of Providence, Williams wrote, "It was not price nor money that could have purchased Rhode Island. Rhode Island was purchased by love."[13] Far-fetched as that claim might seem, in light of Williams's generally unsentimental attitude toward Indian culture it can be taken to show his unusual commitment to the principles of autonomy and reciprocity. That commitment helped make the colony he founded one of the first successful, if tumultuous, experiments in democratic government. Those principles emerge as well from the analysis Williams offered in *A Key into the Language of America; or, An help to the Language of the Natives in that part of America, called New-England*, published in London in 1643. Williams aimed to facilitate peaceful and fruitful interaction between Indians and English colonists, the "key," as he put it, to unlocking the puzzles of Indian culture. Williams translated not only words but also concepts and practices that the English found as incomprehensible as Indian languages. Although a Puritan minister, Williams focused less on converting Indians to Christianity than on trying to understand their ways and explain them. That broad-mindedness sprang from his understanding of Christian faith, not from a precocious cultural pluralism. Until Indians, like Anglicans in England and nonseparating Puritans in Massachusetts, felt of their own volition "true repentance and a true turning to God," attempts at baptism or coerced religious practice would mean less than nothing.[14]

Williams had learned Indian languages by living with Indians, gleaning the knowledge he needed to survive. As he explained in *A Key into the Language of America*, he depended on the Indians' hospitality and their food: "It is a strange truth that a man shall generally find more free entertainment and refreshing amongst these barbarians than amongst thousands that call themselves Christians."[15] From experience Williams came to respect the Indians' resourcefulness and their integrity; he "could never discern that excess of scandalous sins among them which Europe aboundeth with." These pagans committed fewer crimes of all sorts—"robberies, murders, adulteries, &c."—than did the English who claimed to practice Christian charity.[16] Williams found among the Narragansett hearts "sensible of kindnesses"; from them he had "reaped kindnesse" himself on too many occasions to recount. Whereas even "sinners will do good for good, kindnesse for kindnesse," Jesus had admonished his followers to do "good for evill."[17]

American Indians' own willingness to do good for evil, which would eventually prove fatal to them, enabled them to govern themselves in ways

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from which Williams thought the English might learn. The "wildest Indians in America," Williams wrote in 1644, chose their forms of government themselves. Some preferred a "civil compact" in towns; others dispersed more widely. Whatever they chose, he considered "their civil and earthly governments [to] be as lawful and true as any governments in the world." The diverse institutions the Indians established, Williams insisted, derived their legitimacy from the principle of popular sovereignty, which he stated succinctly: American Indians understood that the "sovereign, original, and foundation of civil power," Williams wrote, "lies in the people." For that reason "a people may erect and establish what form of government seems to them most meet for their civil condition." This principle of popular sovereignty, combined with the clear evidence of cultural variety Williams observed from living with the Wampanoags and Narragansetts, meant that no single form of government fits every situation. The divine right of kings, so often accorded quasi-sacred status among Europeans, he judged a particularly foul convention, which legitimated sinfulness at home, and covetousness in the New World, by allowing self-proclaimed Christians to pretend they were doing God's work. America's Indians "must judge according to their Indian or American consciences, for other consciences it cannot be supposed they should have."[18] English authorities who imposed their rule on American Indians were guilty of sinning against the God whose name they invoked.

Historians in the middle decades of the twentieth century took for granted that the story of America was, among other things, a story of democracy.[19] Scholars now often assume the opposite. The history of democracy in early America, however, is neither a triumphal procession nor a fiction.[20] Some English colonies embraced versions of the popular sovereignty that animated Roger Williams, and some of them, like William Dyer and his associates on Aquidneck Island, linked the "democracie" they proclaimed with their fealty to Charles I. Others were just as firmly committed to the principle of divine sovereignty, which officials such as John Winthrop invoked to discipline dissenters such as Williams. Most Puritans struggled to reconcile the two, and they adopted different positions depending on the circumstances and challenges of the moment. No one in New England emerged from these battles altogether satisfied with the outcome. By 1660, however, various forms of governance had emerged throughout England's North American colonies that rested more firmly and explicitly on the principle of popular sovereignty, and incorporated more elements of popular participation, than did any forms found in seventeenth-century Europe. No one set out deliberately to achieve that result. The irony of democracy in America thus begins with the first towns established in New England.

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Debates among English settlers on the role of the people in government began before they landed in America. Preparing to embark for New England, Winthrop lamented the corruption and injustice prevailing in England. Papists threatened Puritans trying to practice their faith, the rapacious wealthy oppressed the defenseless poor, and the law offered no recourse. Trained in the law and serving as a justice of the peace at the court of his manor of Groton, in England Winthrop enjoyed gentry status and the relative affluence that went with it. The cruelties inflicted by the rich on the poor gnawed at his conscience and offended his Christian sense of obligation. A devout Puritan, Winthrop sold his lands and signed on with the Massachusetts Bay Company in exchange for the opportunity to live in a community devoted to the lofty ideals of his faith.

Winthrop laid out those ideals in the address he composed on the *Arbella*, "A Model of Christian Charity." This expression of an ancient Christian aspiration helps explain what happened when these otherworldly Puritans arrived in New England on June 12, 1630. Winthrop began by proclaiming that hierarchy, divinely ordained, is inevitable: "In all times some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity, others mean and in subjection." The importance of that baseline assumption cannot be exaggerated: like almost all of his contemporaries, Winthrop took for granted that "all these differences" were God's will, no more the product of human volition than the weather. Adam's fall bequeathed to all humans a propensity to selfishness. Only divine grace enabled people to act with "Justice and Mercy" toward each other. Justice, the "Law of Nature," the moral law, stipulates that men should follow the golden rule. Mercy, the "Law of Grace," imposes a more stringent requirement on Christians: they must love not only their neighbors but also their enemies. The "rich and mighty should not eat up the poor," as English aristocrats were inclined to do, nor should "the poor and despised rise up against their superiors and shake off their yoke," as rampaging English peasants sometimes did. God's grace enabled, and Christian love required, all to sympathize with their neighbors. Those on the *Arbella* were to be "knit together by this bond of Love," so "the care of the public must oversway all private respects."

Winthrop assured his fellow sojourners that safe arrival at their refuge would ratify God's covenant with them, a covenant that made them, in the phrase from Matthew's Gospel, "a City upon a Hill." If they failed, if they put their "pleasures, and profits" before their love of God and of each other, their failure and their shame would be visible to all of England. Winthrop encapsulated their mission by invoking the counsel of Micah: "to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God." Those embarking for America must "be

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willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities" to provide for "others' necessities." The echoes of the Hebrew scriptures and the Christian Gospels, the lofty ethical ideals of ancient and simple communities of like-minded people, could not have been clearer in Winthrop's opening charge to his shipmates.[21]

Winthrop had been chosen governor by the stockholders of the Massachusetts Bay Company, who were empowered by the company's charter of March 4, 1629, to select the magistrates. These stockholders, designated "freemen," were to meet four times a year to elect a governor, deputy governor, and assistants. When Winthrop agreed to lead the migration of a thousand settlers in the spring of 1630, the company decided to meet henceforth in Massachusetts. Winthrop was permitted to take the company charter with him. Designated the leading figure in the expedition, he assumed he would continue to wield the unchallenged authority in America that he was accustomed to wielding at his manor in England. He was wrong.

Winthrop's problems originated in a tension apparent early in the Reformation. From the outset, Calvinists invoked the higher authority of God's law to legitimate their challenges to the pope. That strategy, as Luther saw immediately, threatened to dissolve all authority. For that reason he urged obedience to civil authorities. Calvinists on the continent and Puritans in England sought to evade the threat of anarchy by tying their challenge to divine law: disobedience to unlawful authorities such as the Catholic Church did not imply disobedience to God's own law as revealed in the Bible. When Puritans employed the language of the covenant, they envisioned a chain of command stretching all the way from God's word, as revealed first to Moses and then elaborated through the Christian scriptures, to the particular restraints imposed on his people by legitimate laws. Obedience to such laws involved no sacrifice of liberty; indeed, Christian freedom could be exercised only by following God's path. When rulers deviated from God's will, resistance was in order, and when civil authorities followed divine law, they must be obeyed. Who could be trusted to see the difference, the people or their magistrates?

The issue of authority became increasingly urgent for Puritans who migrated to New England. The issue had remained abstract in England, at least after the threat briefly embodied by the Catholic Mary Tudor (1553–58) disappeared when she was succeeded by the vigorously anti-Catholic monarchs Elizabeth and James I. When Puritans anxious about the creeping Catholicism of Charles I and Archbishop Laud undertook to reconstitute their communities across the Atlantic, however, they had to decide how to distinguish lawful authority from tyranny. Winthrop discovered right away that not all of those "knit together" in the Puritan covenant agreed that the governor's judgment accorded with God's wisdom. When these settlers first arrived in

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New England, they formed themselves into churches and towns and drew up covenants that quite unself-consciously expressed the ambiguities of their attitude toward authority. They committed themselves to God's law, but those making the commitment took upon themselves the duty to decide its meaning. Those who established the First Church of Charlestown, which soon moved across the Charles River to Boston, signed the following covenant:

> Wee whose names are hereunder written, being by His most wise, and good Providence brought together in this part of America in the Bay of Massachusetts, and desirous to unite our selves into one Congregation, or Church, under the Lord Jesus Christ our Head, in such sort as becometh all whom He hath Redeemed, and Sanctifyed to Himselfe, doe hereby solemnly, and religiously (as in His most holy Proesence) Promisse, and bind ourselves, to walke in our wayes according to the Rule of the Gospell, and in all sincere Conformity to His holy Ordinaunces, and in mutuall love, and respect each to other, so neere as God shall give us grace.[22]

The men who signed the covenant pledged to unite under the Christian law of love. Although their commitment paralleled the high standards Winthrop erected in his "Model of Christian Charity," they acknowledged no authority but God's, and they explicitly pledged to bind themselves to no earthly authority except their own.

Compare the covenant of the First Church to the opening words of the covenant signed by the heads of the families who founded the town of Dedham, southwest of Boston, six years later: "We whose names are here unto subscribed do, in the fear and reverence of our Almighty God, mutually and severally promise amongst ourselves and each other to profess and practice one truth according to that most perfect rule, the foundation whereof is everlasting love." The Dedham Covenant further stipulated that only those who agreed to its terms would be welcome in the town. Others were free to settle elsewhere. If disagreements arose, "then such party or parties shall presently refer all such differences unto some one, two, or three others of our said society to be fully accorded and determined without any further delay." Conflicts would be resolved through mediation. Every individual who became a property holder "shall pay his share" of the charges "imposed on him" and "become freely subject unto all such orders and constitutions as shall be . . . made now or at any time hereafter from this day forward." That phrase "become freely subject" expresses an idea central to these early New England towns. Once individuals voiced their consent, they bound themselves to obey the authority of the community. That was the meaning of autonomy, the acceptance of self-imposed law.

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Like the other founding covenants, the Dedham agreement was meant to cover not only the laws but also—and even more crucially—the spirit infusing the interactions of the townspeople "for loving and comfortable society in our said town."[23] As was true in the case of the Charlestown covenant, those who signed the Dedham covenant acknowledged only the authority of God beyond their own. They were constituting a church and a town in conformity to God's law but on their own terms. Their signatures gave the covenant all the legitimacy it needed.

These steps, grounded on an explicitly stated ethic of reciprocity, were fully consistent with the logic of the Puritans' Congregationalism. They denied the possibility of a single, united church. They insisted that each true church, gathered from among the elect of "visible saints," was independent of—but equal to—every other. Unlike Separatists such as the Pilgrims at Plymouth, however, Congregationalists refused to renounce the Church of England altogether because they cherished the hope that it could be reformed. Thus New England Puritans, although they declared the sovereignty of God and their subservience to his will, nevertheless took a significant step when they established their churches and their towns according to the principles of autonomy and popular sovereignty: their founding documents acknowledged only God's authority above them. The diversity in their interpretations of theology and their religious practice stemmed directly from their intense localism.[24]

The highly charged nature of the Puritan concept of the covenant itself became apparent in the first conflicts Winthrop faced in New England. The officials in charge of the colony convened as the Massachusetts General Court for the first time on October 19, 1630. The magistrates proposed that the stockholders—the freemen—should elect the assistants, who would then choose the governor and the deputy governor. Consistent with the deference typically accorded gentry such as Winthrop, the freemen accepted this proposal, not realizing that it actually curtailed the power given to them by the company charter. But then, and evidently without worrying much about the consequences of a decision that seems puzzling in retrospect, the magistrates decided to open the ranks of the freemen to all property holders who were church members. Perhaps even more significantly, a trading company became a commonwealth, evidently without anyone quite understanding or even noticing the change. Just as paradoxically, the second public meeting of the Massachusetts General Court administered the freeman's oath to 116 colonists—thereby further increasing their number—and determined that in the future only church members could become freemen—at least potentially diminishing their number. That pattern, complex, even contradictory, manifested the implicit logic of the Dedham covenant and provided a model for the confusion to come.[25]

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The logic of the Puritan covenant required all members of the community to bind themselves together, as the Charlestown covenant put it, in "mutuall love, and respect." Unless everyone agreed to submit to the authority that emerged from their agreement to join together, no order, to say nothing of the Christian fellowship they envisioned, would be possible. The customarily firm distinctions between gentry and peasantry began to dissolve in the communities of saints that developed. By establishing church membership as the criterion of inclusion, the early settlers were rejecting another criterion with deeper roots in English tradition, socioeconomic status, for one available to all with whom God had made his covenant. No sooner had the colony's new government been empowered, however, than Winthrop's twelve assistants faced resistance. When they attempted to levy a tax, the people of Watertown, a settlement just up the Charles River from Charlestown and Boston, refused to pay. Watertown insisted that the government of the colony had no authority to "make laws or raise taxations without the people." That response signals the implicit logic of the Puritan covenant and distinguishes the pattern of popular government that emerged in New England from the English model.

In England Parliament had come into being because English kings had to raise revenues; members of the gentry were offered seats in Parliament in exchange for their financial as well as political support. Medieval English practice had involved constituencies choosing and instructing attorneys to represent their interests against the crown, given that Parliament had developed in a very different direction since the twelfth century. Members of Parliament were enjoined to consider the good of the entire realm, not the interests of a particular constituency. By the early seventeenth century, representation in Parliament usually expanded when monarchs assigned seats to boroughs controlled by country gentlemen friendly to the crown's designs. Such gentry often did not reside in such boroughs, and no one expected them to represent the interests of those who did live there.[26]

In response to protests such as that from the people of Watertown, the Massachusetts General Court established a system as early as 1634 whereby each town would choose, in Winthrop's words, "two men to be at the next court, to advise with the governour and assistants about the raising of a public stock, so as what they should agree upon should bind all."[27] Just as the covenant proclaimed by each church congregation emerged from the deliberations of the members—guided, to be sure, but not ruled by the minister they had chosen—so the people of Massachusetts would choose those who would make their laws. When they adopted covenants, the Congregationalists were unwittingly moving toward a position none of them envisioned, abandoning subservience to authority and assuming that authority themselves.

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The elected representatives of the people of Massachusetts extended their authority further at the May 14, 1634, meeting of the General Court. The freemen chosen by the eight towns demanded to see the original charter of the Massachusetts Bay Company. They learned that not only were they empowered to choose the governor and his assistants annually but also that they, the freemen, and not these elected officials, were empowered to make the laws of the colony. Voting for the first time by secret ballot, the assembled freemen then dismissed Winthrop from office and elected as governor his deputy Thomas Dudley. Even more significantly, these delegates from the towns assumed the legislative power that Winthrop and his assistants had usurped. From that point on, the laws of Massachusetts would be those adopted by the representatives elected by the towns of the commonwealth. The General Court would include the governor and his deputy along with two or three delegates chosen by each of the towns of the Bay Colony.[28]

How had things slipped from Winthrop's hands in just four years? How had the Christian brotherhood of the *Arbella*, united under his leadership, become a self-governing assembly of small landowners? How did the people come to meet in separate towns and churches and delegate authority to their representatives, who then gathered to legislate for the colony as a whole? The answers to those questions explain the dynamic of democracy in seventeenth-century English North America: Once the colonists left home and spread out into the lands they settled, they stepped beyond the boundaries of existing government. They had to—and they were able to—make the rules by which they would govern themselves. Those who settled in New England had experience with the forms of town government operating in their native region of East Anglia. They also brought with them the assumptions of seventeenth-century Englishmen accustomed to hierarchal authority extending from God to his faithful king or queen, then from the monarch to the local justice of the peace. In the absence of traditional forms of monarchical and aristocratic dominance, their English experience proved inadequate, even irrelevant. They shared common-law assumptions about landownership and the legal rights and obligations of English subjects, but lacking manorial courts such as Winthrop's in England, they worked out the implications of those assumptions themselves.

The dispersal of the Massachusetts population into discrete settlements began almost immediately. Even though the original charter made no provision for town governments, they materialized anyway alongside the church covenants such as those of Charlestown and Dedham. The proliferation of colony-wide responsibilities prompted Winthrop and the assistants of the General Court from the outset to assign towns various responsibilities, including the

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provision of arms, the building of fences, and the setting of wage rates. Separate town governments sprang up as early as 1633 in Dorchester, 1634 in Boston, and 1636 in Dedham. If dispersing authority to these towns initially suited Winthrop's purposes, he learned quickly that they would be less tractable to his will than Parliament had been to the will of the monarch.[29]

Neither the townspeople nor the magistrates of the Bay Colony understood that these first town governments provided an enduringly influential template. By 1636 the General Court acknowledged the change: it gave to "the freemen of every town, or the major part of them," the authority to "dispose of their owne lands, and woods"; to "make such order as may concerne the well ordering of their owne townes, not repugnant to the lawes and orders here established by the General Court"; and "to chuse their owne particular officers."[30] These settlers did not intend to enact—nor realize they were enacting—a new form of self-rule. The power of local communities to dispose of their lands themselves and enforce their own laws shaped New England culture decisively. Again paradoxes abound. Although towns tended to distribute land to all heads of household, they did so in accordance with individuals' wealth and status. Although they policed behavior strictly, they made much less use of capital punishment for crimes such as theft than did English authorities. They aimed to follow the ethic of equity articulated by the Puritan theologian William Perkins, who urged his readers to avoid extremes, whether lusting after excessive wealth or enforcing the death penalty. Perkins preached moderation in everything except love, urging Christians "to practise this Christian *Equitie* of themselves" rather than being "compelled to it by authoritie." The ethic of equity translated into calls for fairness in the disposition of lands, the treatment of paupers, widows, and orphans, and the punishment of criminals. Conflicts, Perkins and his New England followers agreed, should be resolved through arbitration. Because mutuality and reciprocity were the ideals cherished by these Puritans, they sought to minimize friction.[31]

Widespread landownership meant that popular participation, at all levels of political organization, was from the beginning more widespread in New England than in England, or anywhere else in Europe up to that time. Since 1430, the right to vote in England had been limited to those few adult males who owned land sufficient to earn forty shillings in rent each year, typically around fifty acres. That effectively restricted the franchise to less than 10 percent of the population. The inflation of the seventeenth century changed that equation so that, in principle, perhaps as many as 20 percent of Englishmen could vote. Yet because the practice and significance of voting in England was governed as much by custom as by law, wide variations existed from borough

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to borough.[32] In New England, by contrast, the previously unimaginable availability of land that was unoccupied (at least as seen from the English perspective, if not from the Indians') meant that many more male heads of household met the standard of a forty-shilling freehold. In most towns, at least initially, church membership rather than property holding was prerequisite to voting. Because most male heads of household were church members, at least in the first years of settlement, as many as 60 to 80 percent of adult male New Englanders were eligible to vote in early colony-wide elections. As of 1647, when a law was passed extending the franchise to all "inhabitants," between 60 and 90 percent could vote in Massachusetts town elections. Those percentages diminished over the course of several decades. Fewer newcomers became church members as requirements for membership became more rigorous, and property restrictions became more common.

The practice of voting must be understood in the context of the prevailing Puritan commitments to comity and reciprocity. Freemen did not choose between contending candidates representing different positions or factions. New Englanders interacted in church congregations, town meetings, and courts of law. They submitted petitions to air grievances and brought suits when wronged. Even though most adult males *could* vote, participation rates varied wildly from town to town and decade to decade. Because the goal was reaching consensus about justice and equity, informed by an ethic of mutuality and reciprocity, voting was but one way to be involved in public life.[33]

These New Englanders did not set out to create a democracy, nor did most of them understand what they were doing as democratic. They respected authority and thought of themselves as entirely subject to God's will, the meaning of which they derived from the educated elite of ministers who spoke from the pulpits of their meeting houses. As Congregationalists they selected their own ministers, and as freeholders they elected their own selectmen at the local level and their own representatives to the General Court. Again and again they chose the same people—at first members of the English gentry such as Winthrop and Dudley, and later newly wealthy fellow New Englanders—to occupy town and colony offices. In Dedham, for example, ten prosperous men held most of the town's elected offices for five decades. Because such a small number of comparatively well-off individuals exercised power over such a long period of time, recent historians of New England have stressed the persistence of hierarchy, deference, and hegemony.

Most New Englanders did indeed denigrate democracy as a degenerate form of government, just as they denigrated "disordered" individuals who refused to obey just laws or accept the will of the community. They prized order, peace, and consensus, the very real cost of which became clear when

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individuals such as Anne Hutchinson, Mary Dyer, or Roger Williams challenged prevailing interpretations of scripture and law. The Puritans' greater interest in unity was consistent with a serious commitment to popular authority. They did not see how their reliance on the covenant, which they entered into voluntarily as individuals, would eventually erode the stability and hierarchy they wanted to preserve. They were more worried that toleration of fundamental disagreements might erode the fellowship necessary for the ethic of mutuality that makes people willing to accept defeat when they lose either a discussion or an election or a case in court. The Puritans tried to balance their ancient Christian law of love against the unprecedented freedom of movement available in a new land. They ventured beyond English custom and law equipped with a vision of harmony that the conditions of their settlements—unbounded, ever changing—shattered almost immediately. The world they created, a world of relative equality and unprecedented economic and social mobility, eventually upset the ideals of peaceful order, voluntary submission to authority, and Christian fellowship they brought with them to America.[34]

The Puritans' emphasis on unity persisted despite the conflicts that soon wracked Massachusetts Bay. When Winthrop, serving as deputy governor, was censured in 1636 for allowing Williams to escape, he recorded in his journal his acknowledgment that he should in the future "take a more strict course" in enforcing the law and discussed in detail the magistrates' determination to cope more effectively with disagreements that might erupt in the future by keeping alive the lingering dream of voluntary agreement: if individuals differed with each other in public meetings, they were expected "to express their difference in all modesty and due respect to the court and such as differ." Disagreements were to be expressed as questions rather than direct challenges, and once a consensual decision was reached, "none shall intimate his dislike privately, or if one dissent he shall sit down without showing any further distaste, publicly or privately." Early New Englanders frowned on dissent because they feared divisiveness.[35]

Although such proclamations surely indicate precisely what was not happening, they nevertheless confirm the overall impression left by records of the wrangling in political discussions at all levels of the commonwealth: the early settlers of Massachusetts sought to resolve conflicts by reaching consensus. The recourse to discipline, which could be exercised both by officials against outcasts and by the people or their representatives against figures in authority who fell from favor, meant that mediation and persuasion had failed. Sometimes there was no alternative, as when unruly tongues were silenced or when town meetings turned out their elected officials. Imposing order on the

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recalcitrant, whatever their place in the hierarchy of power, elicited regret, not congratulations.[36]

Any reference to the Puritans' stringent discipline conjures up an image of the stern John Winthrop. Having learned from his leniency toward Williams, Winthrop showed no such mercy to dissenters such as the Antinomians. When Anne Hutchinson and others claimed the authority to preach, arguing that the Holy Spirit dwelled within them, they were tried, excommunicated, and banished. In the midst of the controversy, Winthrop issued an order prohibiting the people of Massachusetts from allowing "strangers" to live with them for more than three weeks without the magistrates' permission. Winthrop's reasoning merits attention because it shows how he understood the complex relation between the origin of government, popular sovereignty, the ethic of mutuality, the covenant, and the legitimate exercise of authority.

A Puritan commonwealth such as Massachusetts originates in the "consent of a certaine companie of people," Winthrop began, to live together "under one government for their mutuall safety and welfare." It follows that "no common weale" and no privileges "can be founded but by free consent." All members must preserve "the wellfare of the bodye" of the whole community, which is not to be sacrificed for the wishes or "the advantage of any particular members." Just as towns and churches could legitimately expel those who refused to abide by their rules—as the Dedham Covenant, for example, explicitly stipulated—so a commonwealth may refuse to accept those "whose dispositions suite not with ours and whose society (we know) will be hurtfull to us." Winthrop concluded with an image frequently used by Puritan ministers: "A family is a little common wealth, and a common wealth is a greate family. Now as a family is not bound to entertaine all comers, no not every good man (otherwise than by hospitality) no more is a common wealth."[37]

To what extent does a commonwealth resemble a family? Is the authority of those empowered by the community similar to that exercised by the biblical patriarch? Having been censured by the magistrates and more than once voted out of office, Winthrop had personally experienced the difference: unlike voters, Puritan wives and children were not authorized to expel husbands and fathers. Yet Winthrop persisted in claiming privileges for those in positions of legal authority considerably grander than those he succeeded in exercising himself. In 1644 he wrote a "small treatise" claiming complete executive and judicial power for the magistrates of Massachusetts, a view the General Court rejected. Again in 1645, after he was impeached following a dispute with the town of Hingham concerning the election of its militia, he used the occasion of his vindication by the court to explain his views on

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authority. Winthrop immediately identified the central issue: the relation between the people's liberty and the magistrates' prerogative. Sustaining officials' authority did not diminish the people's power because "it is yourselves who have called us to this office" through election, "and being called by you we have our authority from God." By voting, the people of Massachusetts enacted God's will; the covenant between electors and elected "is to this purpose, that we shall govern you and judge your causes by the rules of God's laws and our own, according to our best skill."

If the official's authority descends from God through the people, what about the people's liberty? Winthrop distinguished, more fully than he did on the *Arbella*, between two kinds of liberty. "Natural" liberty is "common to man with beasts and other creatures." It is "a liberty to evil as well as to good." This liberty he judged "incompatible and inconsistent with authority"; it "cannot endure the least restraint of the most just authority." Exercising natural liberty makes men "grow more evil, and in time to be worse than brute beasts." Animals enjoy and sinners covet such liberty, which Winthrop branded "the great enemy of truth and peace." His enemies, Winthrop implied, were bewitched by the lure of natural liberty. The other kind of liberty he called "civil," "federal," or "moral." Only those who have entered voluntarily into covenants with God and with one another, covenants binding them to obey, enjoy such liberty. "This liberty is the proper end and object of authority and cannot subsist without it, and it is a liberty to that only which is good, just, and honest." The lesson was clear: Dissenters and rabble-rousers, those who "stand for your natural corrupt liberties," and prefer "to do what is good in your own eyes," refuse to "endure the least weight of authority." But those who are "satisfied to enjoy such civil and lawful liberties, such as Christ allows," will "quietly and cheerfully submit" to the authority exercised "for your good." When authorities err, Winthrop concluded, "we hope we shall be willing (by God's assistance) to hearken to good advice from any of you, or in any other way of God."[38]

Skeptical readers of Winthrop's speech, especially those who see invocations of God's will as veiled justifications of tyranny, dismiss it as a flimsy rationalization, as did some of his contemporaries who interpreted "all the magistrates' actions and speeches" as attempts to secure for themselves "an unlimited power to do what they pleased without control." From Winthrop's perspective, hatred and distrust heightened the "fears and jealousies" of the magistrates' critics to the extent that every step the officials took was perceived as a threat to "the people's liberty."[39] In only fifteen years, Winthrop's "Model of Christian Charity" had become a hornet's nest. Why?

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Winthrop understood the challenges that New England Puritans had set themselves. He prophesied on the *Arbella*, and warned repeatedly afterward, that if the first settlers failed "to abridge ourselves of our superfluities for the supply of others' necessities"—if they failed to place the good of the whole above their individual desires—they would lose "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Whether or not such unity ever characterized the community, that is precisely what happened during their early decades in the New World. These Englishmen, hungry as most of them were for the moral liberty Winthrop contrasted to mere appetite, were also hungry for land. Without deliberately or consciously turning away from God's law, they found themselves also turning toward what Winthrop had called their "pleasures, and profits."[40] In the process they gradually transformed the underlying terms of their interactions from mutuality to competition. They established their religious and their political communities on the foundation of the covenant. The voluntarism implicit in that concept, however, enabled many of them to slip outside the ethic of love, the yearning for unity, and the voluntary acceptance of authority, and to begin exercising forms of freedom that Winthrop judged incompatible with authority and inconsistent with peace. Those who took that opportunity renounced an orderly covenant of Christian neighbors for a different model. Winthrop characterized that alternative disdainfully as a "mere democracy," in which all joined in "public agitation" and advanced their own private interests, instead of deliberating selflessly, under the wise guidance of the gentry, to find the common good.[41]

Democracy in Massachusetts emerged from the collisions of religion and politics. The ideals of Christian fellowship had from their origins in the Gospels challenged prevailing patterns of economic behavior. In Puritan New England that challenge assumed a new shape that mirrored the unprecedented opportunities available to these pious, driven people. It was the notorious case of the merchant Robert Keayne that prompted Winthrop's mournful observation that the Bay Colony had declined from a "mixte aristocratie" into a "mere democracy." Keayne, among the most successful merchants in Massachusetts, was fined by the General Court and censured by the First Church of Boston in 1639 for the offense of price gouging. Having charged more than the accepted profit of six pence on the shilling for goods ranging from bags of nails to golden buttons, Keayne was forced to pay eighty pounds to the commonwealth and "bewail his covetous and corrupt heart" before his congregation. In 1642, still a symbol of greed to many in the commonwealth, Keayne was accused of stealing a sow from Elizabeth Sherman. The General Court, finding itself deadlocked between wealthier pro- and more popular anti-Keayne

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factions, split into two houses, the assistants occupying the upper and the deputies, those representing the towns of Massachusetts, the lower.

Keayne has remained a symbol ever since; his significance is read in many ways. Having provided the occasion for the first emergence of bicameralism in America, he figures (albeit unwittingly) in the history of democracy. His case indicates, too, the conflict between an emergent market mentality and a lingering sensibility distrustful of market mechanisms to approximate what had been called for centuries a "just price." The Puritans have remained central players in the frequently retold drama of the rise of capitalism, and for good reason. They were among the first to glorify work, not for its own sake or because of the wealth unstinting work could win, but as a sign that one might be among God's chosen. Wealth did not guarantee membership in the elect—witness sinful Robert Keayne, censured for his calculating shrewdness—but the failure to prosper, if attributable to the failure to work hard, could be taken as a reliable indicator that one remained unregenerate. Thus the logic of Calvin's theology did indeed translate into a greater willingness to work, and a greater inclination toward asceticism, than was typical of ancient, medieval, or Renaissance aristocrats, who loved comfort but shunned work, or the laboring poor, for whom work was a cross to be borne, not a mark of distinction.

New England Puritans built themselves a trap that has fascinated scholars for a century: the harder they worked to demonstrate righteous mastery over sins such as imprudence or sloth, the more they prospered. The more they prospered, the harder they had to work to demonstrate their righteousness. And so on. Given those crosscutting pressures, there is nothing contradictory about the Puritans' simultaneous success and their self-abnegation.[42] From the beginning, feudal restraints on production and trade failed to take root in New England. Guilds fell away before the fluidity and mobility of the workforce. It was too easy for disgruntled workers, who could be detained or whipped in England, simply to relocate to another town. When the Puritans founded towns, they distributed the land without restricting the terms of resale or transmission through estates. They resisted the monopolies rampant in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England—monopolies that grated particularly on the industrious Puritan merchants and artisans central to the New England migration—unless a temporary monopoly was necessary to induce the building of a mill or a shop deemed necessary to the community.

Two Puritan peers, Lord Brooke and Lord Saye and Sele, discovered just how deep the desire for self-government was when they proposed transplanting heritable aristocratic privilege to New England. Winthrop instructed John Cotton, minister of the First Church of Boston, to explain, with all due

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deference, that Massachusetts would have no House of Lords. All offices in the Bay Colony were earned by "public election" rather than inherited rank. So indispensable were the principles of equity and reciprocity that only the "godly" were deemed capable of exercising proper judgment in civic affairs. Lord Saye and Sele complained to Winthrop that the spirit of New England's people ran so high that no wise man would choose to live where "every man is a master" and "fools determine" policy.[43]

Boisterous as the economy of Massachusetts was, it was the opposite of laissez-faire. Town or commonwealth authorities oversaw industry, commerce, and land tenure to ensure fair and honest dealing. Speculation in property was illegitimate: if land remained undeveloped, it reverted to the town, to be distributed to those who would put it to productive use. Ministers harangued with equal intensity against displays of wealth and displays of lassitude. They urged their congregations to balance hard work with hard virtues. Industrious striving was the rule, ease in wealth or poverty the exception. No one has expressed the heart of the Puritan sensibility better than the third governor of the Plymouth Colony, Edward Winslow, who observed as early as 1624 that in America "religion and profit jump together, which is rare."[44]

Imagining Puritan theology as a fixed, watertight worldview makes it difficult to square with the enterprising activities of seventeenth-century New Englanders, which can make the ministers seem irrelevant or the laymen hypocritical. If we focus instead on Puritanism as a lived religion, we see a series of negotiations, running from the sixteenth century into the eighteenth, between the demands of Calvin's theology and the challenges and opportunities faced by ordinary people living in extraordinary circumstances. New Englanders had a script, which Winthrop expressed clearly in his "Model of Christian Charity," but they found themselves in a situation in which the absence of traditional restraints, legal as well as physical, forced and enabled them to improvise. Although the culture that emerged had its roots deep in the traditions of English nonconformity, New Englanders developed religious, economic, and political practices unlike those prevailing elsewhere in the Atlantic world.[45]

A similar dynamic marked the emergence of democracy in the settlements ringing the Massachusetts Bay Colony, including the one that predated the Puritans' arrival and those established later. The earliest of the founding documents of New England was the Mayflower Compact, signed in 1620 by the original Pilgrims settling in the colony they established at Plymouth. These Separatists, who had given up hope for the Church of England, had first fled to the Netherlands in 1608. When a group of them decided to depart for the New World, their pastor, John Robinson, who chose to remain in Leyden,

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made clear the difficulty of establishing a government on the basis of equality. If these Pilgrims were to form their own body politic, they had to face the fact that, unlike their English brethren, they were not "furnished with any persons of special eminency above the rest, to be chosen by you into office of government." After Robinson urged them, in the absence of an aristocracy, to use their "wisdom and godliness" to select those who would govern in the interest of all, he emphasized that they must then yield to those chosen "all due honour and obedience in their lawful administrations, not beholding in them the ordinariness of their persons."[46]

The Pilgrims would have to remember their mutual dependence. "Wise men," Robinson observed, had endorsed as "good and lawful" three distinct forms of polity—monarchical, aristocratic, and "democratical"—and all had their place in Christ's church: "In respect of him the head, it is a monarchy; in respect of the eldership, an aristocracy; in respect of the body, a popular state." By joining together in independent congregations, the Pilgrims incorporated elements of all three forms, which Robinson thought should be balanced. The "external church government" he judged "plainly aristocratical, and to be administered by some choice men." But the elders' responsibilities do not exhaust all decision making. It remains "up to the people freely to vote in elections and judgments of the church."[47]

A decade later, Winthrop on the *Arbella* was echoing Robinson's words: "Let the elders publicly propound, and order all things in the church," and "let the people of faith give their assent to their elders' holy and lawful administration."[48] From the perspective shared by Robinson and Winthrop, only freedom consistent with the Gospel is true liberty; church elders had to refine untutored popular desire into genuine Christian volition. The Mayflower Compact committed its signers to terms strikingly similar to those Robinson had laid out for them: for God's glory they pledged to "covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil Body Politick, for our better Ordering and Preservation." To that end they came together to "enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions, and Officers" deemed necessary "for the general Good of the Colony; unto which we promise all due Submission and Obedience."[49] The forty-one names signed to the compact included individuals ranging from the wealthy merchant John Carver to ordinary sailors and servants.

Not all of those making the voyage shared the devout Calvinist faith of the Pilgrims. Indeed, the future governor of the colony William Bradford later explained that the Mayflower Compact was drawn up explicitly in response to "discontented and mutinous speeches" given on the ship by some non-Pilgrims—"strangers," as they were designated—who had let it be known

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