

Understanding Liberal Democracy: Classical and Biblical Analysis

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In the maze of contemporary political philosophy, liberal democracy stands as a sort of beacon, weaving together the threads of individual freedom, the rule of law, and governance by the people. As we try to understand this political ideology, it's important to figure out its most basic principles. I will attempt throughout this essay to dissect the five core principles of liberal democracy, diving into the intricacies that define its overall essence. Moreover, it also attempts to cast dual lighting on two of these foundational claims through the prisms of both classical and biblical perspectives. In doing so, I aim not only to comprehend the philosophical groundwork but also to illuminate how this comprehension resonates with the landscape of contemporary American politics.

At the core of liberal democracy is the commitment to safeguarding individual rights and liberties. This claim more or less advocates the idea that everyone has inherent rights that cannot be taken away and should be shielded by the state. John Locke, a very key figure in liberal thought, explores this concept in his "*Second Treatise on Government*." In Chapter 2, Locke argues that individuals possess a natural right to life, liberty, and property. This foundational passage acts as a guiding light, highlighting the paramount importance of individual rights in the realm of liberal democracies.

The principle of the rule of law is the bedrock on which liberal democracies stand. In such societies, everyone, including those in power, are subject to and accountable under the law. Montesquieu, in his work "*The Spirit of Laws*," thoroughly discusses this principle. Throughout the preface and Books 1-3, Montesquieu contends that the rule of law acts as a check on arbitrary power, fostering a society that is both just and stable. This not only underscores the significance

of legal frameworks but also shines a spotlight on the separation of powers as a method of upholding the rule of law.

Moving on we can see at the heart of liberal democracy lies the concept of popular sovereignty, asserting that political authority comes from the people themselves. *The Social Contract* written by Jean-Jacques Rousseau articulates this claim clearly in Book I. Rousseau suggests that individuals, by joining forces and forming a collective body, create a sovereign entity that represents their will. This reimagining severely challenges traditional notions of sovereignty vested in a monarch and firmly places political legitimacy in the hands of the citizenry.

Political pluralism, another key feature of liberal democracy, encourages the coexistence of multiple political parties and perspectives. This claim is grounded in the belief that having a multitude of voices contributes to a richer and more solid democracy. Various course texts, especially those delving into the American Federated Republic, underline the significance of political pluralism in maintaining a vibrant democratic society. Liberal democracies thrive on the existence of democratic institutions that enable the expression of popular will through free and fair elections. The American Federated Republic, as explored in course readings, epitomizes the creation of such institutions. Federalism, with its division of powers between central and regional authorities, ensures representation and participation at different levels of government.

In the classical realm, the reflections of Thomas Hobbes, a cornerstone in political philosophy, presents a compelling counterweight to the liberal democratic passion for absolute individual rights. Hobbes, in his extremely influential work "Leviathan," paints a rather uninviting picture of the state of nature, describing it as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, as well as

short." Within this harsh reality, Hobbes argues that individuals willingly give up some of their natural rights to a sovereign authority. This social contract, as Hobbes posits arises from the necessity for protection and order in a world inherently marked by chaos.

Hobbes's brilliance lies not only in outright rejection of individual rights but in also recognizing the delicate balance required in the social contract. His perspective deeply encourages a nuanced understanding of the tension between individual freedoms and collective security. Exploring Hobbes's vision compels one to grapple with the notion that an unchecked emphasis on personal rights might destabilize the very social fabric that liberal democracy seeks to preserve. This classical critique prompts us to consider the trade-offs existing in pursuing both personal liberty and communal well-being. Hobbes's legacy extends into contemporary debates, particularly in areas like national security, where the clash between individual privacy and collective safety is very noticeable. Furthermore, in the unfolding digital age, issues of surveillance, government intrusion, and civil liberties echo Hobbesian reflections. The classical lens, in this context, stands as a powerful tool for unraveling the complexities of modern challenges related to individual rights.

Shifting focus to the biblical narrative of kingship, particularly using the account in I Samuel 8, we confront a profound reflection on the tension between popular sovereignty and the desire for centralized authority. In this narrative, the Israelites, yearning for a king, receive cautionary words from the prophet Samuel about the potential pitfalls of monarchical power. Samuel warns that a king would demand taxes, conscript sons for military service, and wield authority that might not align with the people's best interests. Despite the warning, the people insist on having a king, and one is anointed. This biblical tale injects a cautionary element into the idealized notion of popular sovereignty in liberal democracy. It serves as a reminder of the

complexities inherent in governance and the potential dangers of unchecked power placed in the hands of the people. The biblical perspective prompts a critical examination of the assumptions underlying the liberal democratic claim of popular sovereignty, suggesting that the people's will must be guided by wisdom and virtue to avoid potential pitfalls.

Derived from this biblical narrative, the contemporary relevance of caution against unchecked popular sovereignty becomes evident. Issues such as populism, demagoguery, and the risks associated with direct democracy take center stage. The biblical lens, in this instance, becomes a profound source for reflecting on the qualities required for responsible citizenship in a democratic society. Scrutinizing individual rights through a classical lens and popular sovereignty from a biblical standpoint, a more nuanced understanding emerges. These perspectives offer a rich tapestry of insights to be woven into the fabric of modern political discourse.

The detailed understanding of liberal democracy, shaped by both classical and biblical perspectives, deeply resonates in today's American politics. A closer examination of the five claims provides not just a lens but almost a kaleidoscope through which we can analyze the ongoing challenges and opportunities shaping the political discourse in our country. In the extremely intricate web of modern political debates, the discussion surrounding individual rights and liberties takes center stage. The perpetual tension between safeguarding personal freedoms and ensuring collective security is undeniable in issues such as privacy concerns in the digital age as well as the ongoing debates over national security measures. Taking a classical detour through the insights of Hobbes, we as a whole are prompted to reconsider the delicate balance between personal liberties and the essentials of societal order.

Hobbes's perspective, rooted in the idea that individuals willingly yield some natural rights for the sake of protection and order, invites a profound reflection. This classical lens challenges us not only to view individual rights as absolute but rather as part of a social contract that demands a very delicate balance between personal autonomy and collective well-being. The legacy of Hobbes resonates particularly in modern discussions on national security, where the clash between individual privacy and collective safety stands as a contemporary manifestation of the age-old debate.

As contemporary challenges to the rule of law unfold, questions surrounding executive authority and the intricate dance between branches of government stresses the enduring relevance of Montesquieu's insights. The division of powers, seen as a protection against unfair rule, becomes a crucial topic in talks about the checks and balances required to uphold the rule of law. In today's American politics, Montesquieu's principles prompt an examination of the careful balance among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The current issues related to the rule of law, such as discussions about executive orders and the boundaries of presidential authority, highlight the lasting importance of Montesquieu's recommendations for a fair and stable society.

The intricacies of popular sovereignty are brought to life in the dynamic workings of modern democracy. Issues like voter suppression and gerrymandering prompt a complete critical evaluation of whether the people's will is genuinely reflected in the political system. The biblical cautionary tale of kingship, with its timeless wisdom, reminds all of us that popular sovereignty requires an informed and virtuous citizenry.

The biblical viewpoint encourages us to see popular sovereignty not just as cheering for the majority but as a duty demanding wisdom and virtue. This stance urges us to critically assess modern challenges to democratic principles, like misinformation and the influence of special interests, prompting us to navigate the complex terrain of today's democracy with an emphasis on ethical governance.

In a time marked by growing polarization, the significance of political pluralism is amplified. The American Federated Republic, emphasizing decentralized power, provides insights into nurturing political pluralism. Examining diverse voices and perspectives becomes crucial in tackling challenges posed by ideological divides.

The American Federated Republic, a testament to intentional power distribution, serves as a guide in navigating the polarized landscape of contemporary politics. As debates over government roles, representation, and diverse perspectives intensify, the lessons from political pluralism ingrained in the structure of the American Federated Republic gain renewed importance. As democratic institutions face scrutiny, especially regarding election integrity, understanding foundational principles becomes paramount. Important lessons from the American Federated Republic underscore the importance of maintaining transparent and accountable democratic processes. In today's American political scene, concerns about election integrity, foreign interference, and the role of money in politics heighten the scrutiny on democratic institutions even more now than ever. Insights from the American Federated Republic become a that guiding light like I described in discussions on electoral reforms, campaign finance, and overall democratic process health.

In conclusion, exploring the claims of liberal democracy through classical and biblical lenses unveils the intricate nature of this political philosophy. The classical critique, as seen in Hobbes's perspective, challenges us to navigate the delicate balance between individual rights and societal order. Simultaneously, the biblical narrative cautions against a simplistic celebration of popular sovereignty, emphasizing the need for wisdom and virtue in governance. In today's American political landscape, these insights resonate very deeply. Navigating ongoing challenges such as balancing individual freedoms and collective responsibilities, upholding the rule of law, and fostering political pluralism, is exceedingly crucial. The lessons from the American Federated Republic and biblical narratives about governance serve as guides in tackling these challenges.

As the United States grapples with the complexities of the 21st century, the enduring relevance of liberal democracy becomes more and more apparent. Rooted in protecting individual rights, upholding the rule of law, and fostering people's participation, this political philosophy remains a guiding force for shaping a just and equitable society. The interaction of classical and biblical perspectives adds depth to our understanding, offering a precise roadmap for addressing pressing issues. In the ongoing dialogue between tradition and the present, liberal democracy emerges as a dynamic force with the capacity to adapt and as well as thrive.

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