of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, paving the way for renewed discretion on the part of individual states to disenfranchise individual voters. Democratic progress can never be taken for granted. Nevertheless, the evolution and the spread of the politics of constitutional restraint since Montesquieu wrote have been remarkable.

Yet in one respect the situation remains unchanged. In their best-selling 2012 book *Why Nations Fail* the political economists Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson set out to explain the fundamental difference between good and bad politics. Their explanation is very simple (or, as they call it, 'parsimonious'). Politics works when it is 'inclusive': i.e., when people with power still have good reasons to take account of what others want. Politics does not work when it is 'extractive': i.e., when people with power see it as an opportunity to take what they can get while they have the chance. (In the jargon of political science this is called 'rentseeking', meaning that political office is treated as a means of extracting rent.) In inclusive states, rival groups realise that they are better off taking turns to pursue their goals, because the alternative of pursuing them regardless would be worse for everyone. Under extractive regimes, rival groups do not think it is worth waiting. Politics becomes now or never. So extractive politics is essentially a failure of trust: a politics of 'diffidence', as Hobbes would call it, leading to endless preemptive strikes. The key to achieving lasting stability and prosperity is to move from an extractive regime to an inclusive one. On this account, Britain's constitutional revolution in 1688 remains a pivotal moment in modern history. Every state, if it is to be successful, needs something similar.

Acemoglu and Robinson insist that there is nothing deterministic about their account of political success. Their aim is to show that the plight of impoverished nations is not predetermined by climate, or geography, or culture, or religion. No nation is fated to fail. They point to the case of North and South Korea: essentially the same country, with the same geography, made up of the same people. But the divergent political paths the two states have followed since 1953 has made one among the wealthiest nations in the world and the other among the poorest. The difference inclusive politics makes could hardly be starker.

But though it is easy to summarise what makes the difference, it is very hard to know how to make it happen. The problem is that the move to inclusive political institutions is always highly contingent: it is a consequence of the complicated interplay between chance