

# Democracy and our Intellectual Plight

## I. DEMOCRACY AND MORALITY

**A** CERTAIN deep-seated vice or weakness of democracy was pointed out long ago. It is that for the individual democracy is uninteresting. Taken by himself alone, he has so little power that it seems to him unimportant whether he exercises it or not. To Frederick or Napoleon the business of government was interesting. It was creative work on a colossal scale. He could see his own strokes shaping a nation. His material, of course, was more or less intractable but still it again and again was fashioned to his purpose. To govern is, for a despot, an exciting occupation. To exercise the elective franchise of a single citizen under democracy is not exciting. Nothing can make the citizen believe that it is a vital matter whether he, as a single unit, casts his vote or not or even for whom he casts it.

It has often been said that this want of interest would be remedied under civic socialism; for there the government would be controlling interests so close and vital to every citizen that he would have to give his attention. No doubt the degree of attention would be increased, but the vice or weakness would still exist, for it would be yet more painfully evident to a citizen how little power he had by himself to control the affairs that concerned him. He would be but one of innumerable stockholders. The obstacle is more deeply lodged in the nature of democracy than this suggestion realizes.

Now the curious thing is that there is a very similar vice or weakness in the scheme of morality. May it not be that the means by which this weakness has been met in morality is the very means required to meet it in democracy?

In morality what is in question is not the power of the individual but the power of the individual act. Morality exists for the welfare of society and for that only. But an individual cannot be made to believe that one particular lie or one unobserved petty theft or one small and unpunished breach of contract will do any great harm to society. He admits at once that if everybody did the like society would suffer. Indeed, he sees that if he on every occasion did the like society would suffer, not to mention himself. But that is not the case in question. The case in question is the single act. If he measures by consequences, his common sense tells him that what he does in such a particular case is often not very important.

Now what has morality done to meet the difficulty? I call it a difficulty because when the particular cases accumulate and we have many cases, lying, theft, breach of contract do injure society and it is important to suppress them. Morality introduces one of the most momentous of ideas, the idea of the sacred. It says truth is a sacred thing. It says honesty and contract are sacred things. It puts a peculiar stigma of discredit and disgrace, quite apart from the thought of consequences, on those who disregard the taboo. To make a moral law take effect and secure a volume of good consequences it is necessary to give it a certain prestige and majesty, to make it "inviolable", to secure in its favor a dumb, uncalculating instinct of obedience. Unless people make up their minds to obey the rule always they will not obey it even enough for wholesale purposes. The rule must be sacred.

To be sure, this state of things is not fully realized in morality. The taboo is there but it is not always obeyed. It does not matter, however, for our argument, just how far it succeeds. The taboo does work powerfully toward getting the law more uniformly obeyed and obedience is sadly needed for the general welfare.

If we follow the same clue as to democracy we should endeavor to make the citizen's exercise of his elective franchise a sacred duty. Public opinion in a well constituted democracy would attach discredit and disgrace to the omission of civic duty or of anything that it involves. The organs of society most immediately charged with the office of teaching this civic morality and training conscience are the school and the church. The best available source of influence upon the school and the church is the college. At present there is on this point little or no public opinion that makes its pressure felt and its disapproval sting.

This is the first conclusion suggested; but it must be amplified a little. We may say that there are two groups, the enormous group consisting of all voting citizens and the small group consisting of elected officials, members of legislative bodies, etc. We may call them the inner group and the outer group. Now, strange to say, the vice or weakness that impairs the outer group as ultimate repositories of civic power impairs also the inner group as agents or instruments of that civic power. We find in the representatives the same vice or weakness that we find in the represented.

Anyone who has had to do with committees, boards, legislative bodies of any sort knows this.

The power of the individual is small. He can do nothing except by convincing others. And the difficulty of moulding opinion by words becomes a too familiar fact. The etiquette and propriety of such a body calls for courtesy, modesty, reticence, caution, dignity, amiability, and the like. These obstruct the individual's standing out for the interest of those whom he represents. That is, the etiquette and propriety of the occasion tend to be determined by the comfort and convenience of the inner group who are present, not by the interests of the outer group who are not present but whom the inner group exists solely to represent. Pages of the New Republic could be filled with examples, taken from the procedure of "best citizens." It is often precisely the "best citizens" who most feel the ethics of the inner group and forget their duty to the outer group. The power of the individual being small, it seems not worth while to make a great effort to exercise it.

What has been said of the larger group applies then to the smaller. The duty of the representative to the represented could take to itself the emphasis of a "sacred duty." The alternative of a moral esteem or a moral discredit could attach to it.

## II. DEMOCRACY AND LOGIC

We have seen that the natural interest of the governor in government is sadly reduced under democracy because one vote at the polls or one voice in council accomplishes so little. Now this interest is reduced in another way. Democracy is government not by force but by discussion. The ideal of democracy is that the reasonable idea, the reasonable proposal, should conquer by its reasonableness. According to this ideal there would still be possible for strong minds and characters the interest of great creative work. Whoever conceived or popularized the right ideas would carry these ideas into law by influencing the fair minds of the electors. The thinker or the popular leader would have power by the truth of his ideas. He would become in a sense an effective governor in a new way, by the power of right reason. Hence he would have incentive. Such is the ideal of democracy. Instead of this we see the incentive of the thinker and sound leader brought down to a minimum because truth is not mighty and (for an indefinite length of time) does not prevail. There is no free passage for ideas into the popular mind, but perpetual obstruction.

Now is there such a thing as logical education? Can citizens be trained in the elementary habits of the fair mind? Can these elementary habits be stated as a simple technique? I cannot help

thinking that they can. Can minds of average intelligence be drilled at school in this technique? I believe so. Does any form of education now produce this result—or aim at this result? I believe it does not. Would this teaching remove the colossal mental obstruction to intelligent democracy? It would gradually and steadily reduce it.

"I don't know anything about logic," said an accomplished graduate of Cambridge University. Logic is a "highbrow" subject, put in a historical scholar who was present. Unhappy fact, if fact it be; for logic is an indispensable basis of an efficient democracy. No manipulation of blind feelings and impulses will serve the purpose. No adjustment of "interests" will do, for the evil is that voters will not vote according to their interests.

The actual nature and use of logic have been so distorted by that singular excrescence called a text-book of logic that we are put to it to see what they really are.

There is only one force that makes a bad mind out of a good one or a tolerable one, a force that has been able to accomplish this result in the majority of civilized minds. That force is "the will to believe"; more fully expressed, the willingness to believe on insufficient evidence, because the belief is attractive, or the opposite unattractive, or the labor of further thinking unattractive. To believe by attraction instead of believing on test, that is the temptation. To teach the tests, that is the business of logic. The effectual principles of logic are simple. The first principle of logic is the principle of objectivity; that is, that you do not carry the tests in yourself, that they are objective. The human mind has got upon firm ground just in proportion as it has escaped from its own plausibilities to objective tests. The will to believe takes the guise of certain fallacies that we are ever encountering, fallacies easily listed, easily exposed, the essence of which is that they beg the question of objective evidence and fall back on other recommendations to belief. The only difference between them lies in the nature of the other recommendation on which they fall back. The prevailing errors in reasoning, responsible for most of the harm of false conclusions, are *obvious* errors. We should all see and avoid them except that we are looking the other way. Fallacy, like the juggler, distracts our attention. To turn our heads round and make us look straight at the obvious principle we have ignored is the business of logic.

You will not make men thinkers, you will not make them thorough analysts; these arts are born of a temperamental bent; but you can make the

growing mind learn to observe certain rules. They are not so difficult to learn as spelling. They are about as difficult as grammar. It must be remembered that *one* of the most important of the rules is mere caution in coming to a conclusion. Suspension of judgment till the tests are met requires to be inculcated and practised.

All this is abstract because it must be brief. Abstraction, as always, is shorthand.

Logic is not the correct reasoning process; it is not the way the mind moves when it moves rightly. There is not in the human mind a track or tramway called logic on which thought moves correctly and from which it should not be "derailed." Logic does not at all treat of the reasoning process; that is, the actual mental process by which we pass to new knowledge or opinion. Psychology does that. All minds pass in the same way to new knowledge or opinion. There is only one reasoning process. That is the association of ideas. One idea suggests another. All minds jump to conclusions or creep to conclusions by suggestion. "The method by which the fool arrives at his folly" is one with that by which the wise man reaches his wisdom. Logic is something quite different. It is an attempt to formulate the *tests* by which we discover whether our new idea is warranted, whether we have jumped to a safe conclusion. Logic has found, and found from human experience, that certain conditions are observable under which coming to a conclusion is safe and the conclusion will not have to be abandoned; and other conditions under which it is unsafe and untenable. Logic draws up these tests in certain rules. These rules never say, "Think thus and thus, put one foot before another thus and thus in your process of thought." That would be futile; we can only think in one way. They tell you how to test the conclusions of your thought after you have got it. They say, Observe whether the evidence, the data, fulfill certain conditions. If so, then go forward.

To draw up a list of prevalent fallacies, to give them suitable names, to gather instances of each, to show in each the presence of the will to believe, to point out the objective test that has been disregarded, this is the simple task of logical education. It is far simpler and more vital than the text-books of logic. Logic is essentially "the fight against fallacy." Its life is in dealing with cases. It must teach us to define terms and remain true to our definitions. It must strengthen our faith in common sense when we judge of experiment and observation. It is indeed nothing but formulated common sense. It need not bother us with syllogism or the details of inductive methods—need not if its object be to arm the average citizen against

fallacy. It is a brief and simple discipline in its maxims, but demands practice. It can never be imparted by lectures, only by drill.

Compare the expert with the average man. The expert knows by tests outside himself and has no desire but to abide by them. Anyone can sway his mind. If a child brings him a new fact that child can transform his judgment. His judgment is hung like scales to be delicately responsive to facts from without. The average judgment is caught in some obstruction and rendered immovable. It seems often to rejoice that nothing you can say, no fact you can bring, will affect it. Logic is a social bond. It forcibly opens our minds to each other when without it they would be closed and barred.

This social bond being largely absent, democracy miscarries; the community is not guided by its own real welfare; it is guided even at the best by spells and attractions. In 1893 Mr. Shaw wrote as follows: "The chief difficulty in dealing with Mr. Gladstone as a statesman arises from the fact that his statesmanship, such as it is, has nothing to do with his popularity. A man must be a skilled citizen, so to speak, to appreciate statesmanship; and our electorate does not include one percent of voters who have skilled citizenship enough to know whether Mr. Gladstone is a real statesman or not. It is as an artist, an unrivalled platform artist, that Mr. Gladstone is popular. Jefferson's Rip Van Winkle never attained the vogue of Gladstone's Grand Old Man. Every touch of it delights the public. The tree-felling, the lesson-reading, the railway journeys punctuated with speeches, the feats of oratory and debate, the splendid courtesy and large style, the animated figure with the blanched complexion lighted by the great eyes, the encyclopaedic conversation, the elastic playing with an immense burden of years: all these bring rounds of applause louder and longer than any merely theatrical actor can hope for. Mr. Irving in the Lyceum is but the microcosm: Mr. Gladstone in England is the macrocosm. The parallel is close in every respect except that of magnitude. Mr. Irving is deservedly so popular as an artist that it is unpopular to deny that he is a connoisseur in literature as well. And Mr. Gladstone, too, is so popular as an artist that it is unpopular to deny that he is a great political thinker as well." Just so, it may be added, Roosevelt's "Livest Man in America" had a phenomenally long run. He had undeniably some of the attributes of a sagacious statesman, but it was not his statesmanship, it was his fascination as a public figure that gave him, in the opinion of historians, the greatest following any individual in this country has had.

Again, everyone knows that the successful man-



ager, whatever his office, is prone to resort to certain wiles in guiding other men in council, simply because they cannot be swayed by sound argument alone. He touches with a sure, light hand upon their self-interest, prejudice, vanity, dread of ridicule, indolence, etc.; he is thus able to bring about a good result which he cannot so surely or swiftly effect by reasoning. Mr. Lloyd George has for the most part to deal with minds inflexible, unfair and blind to his situation; his amazing success is due to his acute study of these minds, not chiefly to the truth of his ideas. In general "politicians" are produced by the mental state of the people who pour contempt upon them; at all events by a state of mind of which theirs is a fair specimen. Academic thinkers have little in their work to make them realize the parallelogram of the forces with which a statesman is in actual contact. Statesmanship, as Mr. Ellis Barker has pointed out, is taught in no university. Statesmanship in our present democracy is largely the thankless and baffled art of dealing with irrational forces.

Democracy, we say, wishes to substitute for the sway of despots the sway of true ideas. Nothing could be more remote from the actual state of democracy—or of human cooperation at large. "Those who govern," says Franklin in his *Autobiography*, "having much business on their hands, do not generally like to take the trouble to consider and carry into execution new projects. The best public measures are therefore seldom adopted from previous wisdom [that is, from previous reflection] but forced by the occasion." Unconsciously echoing Franklin, Mr. Wells remarks that people in prominent positions cannot do any work, meaning any thorough reflective examination to find out what would be the true policy. The people do not demand or recognize such thorough insight into the means of securing their welfare. Disraeli's character Sybil "found to her surprise that great thoughts have very little to do with the business of the world; that human affairs even in an age of revolution are the subject of compromise." Bagehot remarks in his masterpiece, *Sir Robert Peel as a Statesman*, that the modern statesman is a man of common ideas though of uncommon abilities. The modern democratic community is not organized to give free passage to correct ideas, but is such as to obstruct their circulation. What we need, then, is free mobility for sound ideas such that the originator or formulator or preacher of them will have this incentive, that his ideas may prevail. Such a relation between minds can be secured by elementary logical education only, which is the abc-training of a fair and open mind. We are sufficiently remote from any

such consummation. The teacher, however, sees his efforts begin to tell at once.

This conclusion seems doctrinaire, academic, remote from life, only as long as we do not see a few guiding principles that can be disengaged from the wilderness of mental detail.

### III. LOGIC AND MORALITY

It appeared above that the citizen's governing function should be regarded, for reasons given, as a sacred duty. We then saw that this duty could not be performed to good purpose without an elementary training in logic, or in other words, in fairness of mind. Very well, a part of the civic duty, a part of the sacred thing, will be to observe the rules of a fair mind. To serve the general welfare is what morality is for; the duty to observe the plain rules of safe inference is not only a part of morality, it is the most momentous part, for it has the greatest effect upon welfare. There is, in fact, no more abject weakness in our intellectual state than its propensity to forget that morality is not a mere blind taboo existing for its own sake, but a means to an end, by which end it must be measured and shaped; that its sole business is to avert misery and produce well-being. A state of ideas in which this is not recognized remains primitive and barbarous; when education recognizes it we take the step across into a civilization aware of the possibility of controlling its own fate. Our present morals lay stress on the control of self, but not on the control of events. The general happiness, however, depends on the control of events. And this depends upon intelligence. To be as intelligent as possible becomes a central part of morality. We think of the acts of statesmen and of electors under the categories of opinion, which is free to all, of judgment, good sense, shrewdness or their opposites. We must be taught to think of them also under the categories of morality.

### IV. DEMOCRACY AND THE INTELLECTUAL CLASS

The intellectual class is apt to feel somewhat thus: "Oh! If the populace could only be like ourselves, if only we knew of some way of making them intellectual!" "The thinking portion of society" laments its impotence to spread its own standards amongst the multitude. But is it not possible that the difficulty lies with that class itself? Is it not possible that the sound standards of the intellectual class are—missing; that it is in that very class that the abc-training of the fair mind must begin?

If we wish to employ a first-rate surgeon, civil engineer or sanitary engineer we know how to find him. We do not for this have to understand surgery or engineering. We can find the experts

because people agree as to who they are. Such an agreement exists because, in a sufficient measure, the experts agree amongst themselves. And this because there are, within these several professions, definite tests by which achievement is measured. The case is typical. We find a large measure of consensus, we find recognized guides, in any subject in which the tests of achievement are recognized. If then you wish in a given subject to have recognized experts, secure within it the application of definite tests. This was the principle of John Stuart Mill. It follows that the intellectual portion of society would have authority and would lead, in things political and social, if it did its own work well enough, if it could develop that intellectual conscience which is mindful of the tests that alone protect us from arbitrary opinion and bring us to objective success.

In other words, the reason why the intellectual class does not possess a greater influence over affairs, the reason why it must so generally sit on a hill and watch the tide, is that it is not intellectual enough, that it lacks seriousness, self-criticism, a sense of responsibility, is self-indulgent and lets itself go in its thinking, that hence it is wanting in objective grip and lingers in a state of mental nonage. In a word, it lacks discipline. This is at once effect and cause of the fact that our education, including our higher education, does not impart such discipline. Nor does the world of printed discussion, "the republic of letters," give it. For example, there is a prejudice against detailed destructive criticism, such as Macaulay's review of Gladstone, or James Mill's of Mackintosh, or John Mill's of Sedgwick, Whewell, or Hamilton. But precisely so far as a subject, such as political and social science or ethical philosophy, is removed from experimental test, it requires that we shall be resolutely and persistently reminded of the obvious principles of common sense and caution, which, for all their obviousness, in our self-indulgence we persistently forget. A watchful and searching criticism becomes the chief means of applying the logical pressure which the immediate verdict of facts, the brute force of palpable refutation, no longer applies. Such criticism is but a form of that logical education the essence of which is the systematic exposure of fallacy. Speaking of Mill on Hamilton, an acute reader once remarked: "It wasn't that Hamilton was so bad, but that for once a book got reviewed." We have to be reminded by something outside ourselves, whether it be experiment or another and vigilant mind, of the dangers to which easy thinking is always exposed.

The conclusion is that the reforming efforts of the intellectual class should begin at home. The

education to affect is first of all that given in universities. The persons to effect it are university teachers. The person to begin is—any teacher; provided he has had the requisite education himself, or is willing to give it to himself; to turn deliberate heed upon the humble principles of "fair play" in coming to conclusions. What is most needed is a practical text-book. The first step toward making the simple technique of honest thinking, the morals of the mind, effective amongst the multitude, is a potent step; to set it at work at the points from which, according to the principle of Mill already stated, the most powerful radiations are capable of spreading.

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## How to Spend a Million

WE reveal ourselves in our day-dreams, so the Freudians say. If this is true, I have in my possession a group of documents produced at my request by several hundred people, which ought to cause any disciple of Freud to grin with delight. They represent a cross-section through the minds of a number of those individuals who so infrequently get a chance to break into print and let us know their inward thoughts—the plain people, in fact, on whose behalf editors always profess to be writing and of whom they often know so little from personal contact.

It happens that some months ago I was one of a group of people consulted by a wealthy gentleman on an unusual quest. This person is planning to devote a large part of his substantial fortune to advancing the welfare of humanity in some way, and at that time was puzzled as to the wisest procedure. He is not interested in ordinary charity, which seems to him all too ineffective even when it seeks only to palliate. He does not wish to advance any "ism," economic or religious. After studying the history of a number of foundations created by wealthy men, he has the liveliest doubts of the ultimate efficacy of such enterprises. In short, he sought some type of expenditure which would be permanent in results, would aid the whole community instead of any single class, and if possible, would be self-perpetuating, either earning its way or inducing additional contributions by other wealthy men, or both.

This is a difficult set of conditions, and the group called in consultation proved infertile of ideas. With the permission of the perplexed philanthropist, I therefore explained his problem in the columns of a daily newspaper, the New York Globe, and invited the readers of that paper to aid him.