

Democracy: Essential Concepts

Class handout by Mindy McAdams, Aug. 29, 2007

Institutional characteristics of modern democracies:

- Elected representatives
- Free, fair and frequent elections
- Freedom of expression
- Access to alternative and independent sources of information
- Autonomous associations
- Inclusive citizenship

Crick, B. (2002). *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, pp. 107–108.

Some essential concepts

“Voting Was My ‘Birthright,’ But Not My ‘Citizenship’ Right,” by Congressman Jesse L. Jackson, Jr. (D-Illinois), 2005

http://www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/il02_jackson/050311VotingBirthright.html

“Natural Rights Don’t Exist,” by Jonathan Wallace, author of *Sex, Laws, and Cyberspace: Freedom and Censorship on the Frontiers of the Online Revolution* (1997)

<http://www.spectacle.org/0400/natural.html>

“Enlightenment and Human Rights,” from *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*, a collaboration of the Center for History and New Media and the American Social History Project

<http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/chap3a.html>

Property, law and “the common good”—

“Let It Be: Richard Epstein offers a systematic defense of *laissez-faire* economics,” a *New York Times* review of the book *Principles for a Free Society: Reconciling Individual Liberty With the Common Good* (1998)

<http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/11/01/reviews/981101.01weissmt.html>

United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>

Some essential thinkers

John Locke: “In *Two Treatises of Government* [1680–1690] he has two purposes in view: to refute the doctrine of the divine and absolute right of the Monarch ... and to establish a theory which would reconcile the liberty of the citizen with political order.”

<http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/l/locke.htm#Two%20Treatises%20of%20Government>

Niccolò Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* (1513) and *Discourses on Livy* (1531), a commentary on the Roman republic; he advocated that a ruler must build up and maintain power at any cost. He wrote: “[I]t is necessary to whoever arranges to found a Republic and establish laws in it, to presuppose that all men are bad and that they will use their malignity of mind every time they have the opportunity ...” (*Discourses on Livy*, Chapter 3).

<http://www.philosophypages.com/ph/macv.htm>

John Stuart Mill, author of *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) and *On Liberty* (1859), said “that we should sacrifice economic growth for the sake of the environment, and should limit population as much to give ourselves breathing space as in order to fend off the risk of starvation for the overburdened poor.”

<http://www.utilitarianism.com/jsmill.htm>

Montesquieu (Charles de Secondat, Baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu), author of *Spirit of Laws* (1748), said there are three forms of government: monarchy, republic, despotism. He advocated the division of power among three branches of government: the executive, the legislature, and the courts.

<http://www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/montesquieu/montesquieu-bio.html>

John Rawls, author of *A Theory of Justice* (1971), “is considered by many to be the most important political philosopher of the second half of the 20th century ...” He argued against utilitarianism, saying it is unacceptable to allow the rights of a few to be sacrificed for the benefit of the many.

<http://www.policylibrary.com/rawls/>

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, author of *The Social Contract* (1762), wrote about “the noble savage” and what he called *volonté générale*, or “the general will.” By working together for the common good, humans can rise above their base competitive nature; this is “society” (or perhaps “civil society”).

<http://www.lucidcafe.com/library/96jun/rousseau.html>

Herbert Spencer, author of *The Man versus the State* (1884), was “initially best known for developing and applying evolutionary theory [Darwinism] to philosophy, psychology and the study of society ... usually remembered in philosophical circles [today] for his political thought, primarily for his defense of natural rights and for criticisms of utilitarian positivism ...”

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/s/spencer.htm>

Alexis de Tocqueville, author of *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840), spent nine months traveling in the United States when he was 25 years old. His work is a mixture of journalism, opinion, and political science.

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/>

Voltaire, playwright, poet, and author of *Candide*, a satirical novel (1759), “needed but to obey the mandates of the rules to live as the pampered child of luxury and ease, but this Voltaire always refused to do.”

<http://www.positiveatheism.org/hist/darrow5.htm>