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Political Theory:

Examining the Ethical Foundations of Politics

At the conclusion of the last chapter, we considered the ethics of nationalism. Is nationalism an ethical means of expressing a group's desire for self-determination, or is it an unethical posture that gives rise to the tendency to exclude from fair treatment all members outside the group? Normative questions (questions involving value judgments concerning what is right and wrong) such as these are central to politics. Even when political scientists are being thoroughly empirical—recording, observing, and analyzing data—they deal with a subject matter that, by its very nature, raises ethical questions.

For example, you might read a book on Yugoslavia that meticulously records empirically observable data on the country's recent conflicts. The book might give you details on names, dates, demographic statistics, nationalistic customs, battles, and such. The author might teach you more than you ever thought you could know about the empirically documented history and politics of Yugoslavia. Still, you might come away from the book with the uneasy feeling that you still don't *understand* what happened in Yugoslavia. You might suspect that you can never understand it until you sort out for yourself the following kinds of questions: Is immorality unavoidable in politics? Is human nature bad? Is justice a realistic goal? Do people have moral obligations to respect human life as sacred, or is life such a difficult struggle that we should all just concentrate on our own survival? An understanding of political life that never scrutinizes the ethical dimensions of politics is an incomplete understanding.

Political theory is a subfield in political science, focusing on the normative and ethical questions of politics. In this chapter, we will explore some of the perennial

normative issues that have puzzled political theorists for centuries. Our objective will be twofold: to understand the historical and textual teachings of the theorists we study, but also to take their teachings out of their own historical settings and see whether those teachings can be relevant to us as we struggle with the political, social, and economic problems of the twenty-first century. In other words, political theory involves both the study of texts and the act of critically thinking about what those texts teach us.

ANALYZING POLITICAL THEORY: PLATO'S ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE

Plato (427–347 B.C.) was one of the leading philosophers in ancient Athens. His family included notable political leaders, and he served Athens, first, by a term in the military during Athen's war against Sparta, and, second, through his intellectual and cultural contributions. Plato formulated his philosophy during a period of intense intellectual activity in ancient Athens. He observed his teacher Socrates (470?–399 B.C.) critique the Sophists, a group of philosophers who taught the art of rhetoric and who claimed among their practitioners the philosopher Protagoras (480?–411 B.C.). The search for wisdom—not the mastery of the art of rhetorical argument—should engage the mind, according to Socrates. Socrates' philosophizing brought him into conflict with the political elites of Athens, who condemned him to death in 399 B.C. on charges of impiety and the corruption of youth.

Both Socrates and Plato lived through the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta, in which Athens was finally defeated in 405 B.C. This war was chronicled by the great Athenian historian and theorist Thucydides (460?–404? B.C.). In his history of the war, Thucydides records the famous funeral oration of the Athenian leader Pericles (495?–429 B.C.), delivered during the first year (434 B.C.) of the war. In this oration, Thucydides praises Athens as a city-state devoted to intellectual and cultural excellence as well as the realization of the common good of the entire citizenry.

Plato's Academy taught students between the years 387? B.C. and A.D. 529. The Academy educated Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) and others in philosophy, law, mathematics, and logic. Plato's writings would influence scholars such as Philo of Alexandria (15 B.C.?–A.D. 50?), who integrated Platonic teachings with Judaism, St. Augustine (A.D. 354–430), whose works on Christian political theory were influential in shaping ideas on secular–religious relations during the medieval period, and Averröes (A.D. 1126–1198), an influential Islamic writer whose works have contributed to legal, religious, and political theory.

Plato uses Socrates as a major character in many of his works. In *The Republic,* Plato presents an allegory that is useful in illustrating the difficulties and rewards of critical, philosophical analysis. This allegory, the **allegory of the cave,** may be read as a parable of political theory itself. Like all parables and allegories, the richness of its teachings lies not in the literal details of the story, but rather in the larger philosophical questions implied by the details. Just as the parable of the boy who

cried wolf, for example, is not really meant to teach the mechanics of sheep herding or wolf tracking, but instead is a compelling allegory because it teaches us about issues such as honesty and human needs, so with Plato's allegory of the cave. It is not really about caves at all; it is about grappling with the questions we need to understand in order to become enlightened about the world.

In *The Republic,* Plato has the character of Socrates begin the allegory of the cave by telling us the allegory is supposed to illustrate the process of achieving understanding and enlightenment. This is why the allegory is so useful as a parable of political theorizing, because political theory is a history of the search for enlightenment on the normative questions of politics.

What is the human condition as it pertains to enlightenment or ignorance? In the allegory, Socrates contends that, to begin answering this question, we should imagine ourselves living in an underground cave. As residents of this cave, we are unaware of the most fundamental aspects of our environment. For example, we do not know we are actually inside a cave, because we assume the surroundings we observe constitute the entire universe. We have no idea that above us is a ground level, a sky, a sun, because we automatically believe all that we see is all that is real. Our vision in this cave, Socrates explains, is very limited. The cave is dimly lit, and discerning images and shapes is difficult. However, because we have always lived in this cave, we don't *feel* it is dark and blurry; to us, everything looks normal.

Things are going on in this cave that we do not know about. We are shackled so we can only look forward. Having never experienced looking backward, we do not know this is even possible, and therefore we do not realize we are shackled. Behind us are three important objects: a fire casting light on the walls of the cave, a pathway leading out of the cave, and groups of people moving objects that cast shadows on the walls of the cave. We see only the shadows in front of us, and have no clue these are merely shadows being created by moving objects. Having no reason to think otherwise, we consider the shadows real.

Thus our lives consist of watching shadows. We are mesmerized by our world, not knowing its vacuous nature. We are entertained, informed, and reassured by the mundane and the sublime in our reality, not knowing both are merely artificial constructs. We are so certain that we know reality—after all, we are empirically observing it—that our complacency has become part of our nature. All is right with the world, we feel.

Then something shatters life in the cave: A person stands and looks around. On making these unprecedented movements and looking into these new directions, the person feels intense discomfort. Standing up, turning around, seeing the fire—all these bold moves strain muscles and eyes unaccustomed to such "unnatural" things. The individual experiences confusion, as his or her vision and equilibrium have to adjust to the newness of standing and seeing light. The individual, Socrates continues, immediately considers rejecting everything he or she sees: it all looks unfamiliar, unreal, untrue, unnatural, wrong. It makes the individual feel very uncomfortable. The individual may want desperately to turn away from all these new things, but what if he or she does not? What if the individual moves up the cave's pathway and above ground? Here the individual encounters more shocks and becomes even more frightened and miserable, because the light of the

sun is completely overwhelming to someone who has always lived in a cave. The individual is blind and lost.

Yet slowly things begin to change. The eyes adjust, and the individual begins to see not only the sun but also the land, the sky, the world. The individual now realizes there is an entire universe beyond the underground cave. The cave is not the world, living in shackles is not living freely, watching shadows play along a wall is not knowledge of what is real—the former prisoner now knows all these things.

The enlightened individual begins to feel an urgent need to share this wonderful knowledge with the others in the cave. Thus, in the allegory, the individual goes back down the pathway, re-enters the cave, and starts revealing to the others that there is a life above ground. He or she tells the cave dwellers that they are in shackles, looking backward is possible, standing up and moving around is possible, those shadows they have been watching all their lives (and which their parents watched before them) are just images created by movements they have never seen.

How do you think the prisoners respond to these claims? In the allegory, the prisoners decide the individual is mad, dangerous, or both. They assume the individual's vision has been ruined. The individual has lost touch with reality, if he or she thinks looking backward is "normal." The individual is talking nonsense, the cave dwellers conclude. If the individual persists in trying to liberate the others, Socrates is very clear on what will happen: The individual will be killed by the cave dwellers.[1]

All of us relive the journey of the individual in Plato's allegory, perhaps, when we think critically about politics. Critical thinking is difficult and sometimes unsettling, and often produces conclusions at odds with the status quo of our "caves." Thinking critically about the purposes of the state may lead us to believe that the accepted wisdom of our society is no more real than a shadow on a wall. As a result, political theory has produced ideas that are often controversial and sometimes elicit strong opposition. Socrates himself was considered dangerous and was condemned to death by Athens. Eighteenth-century conservative theorist Edmund Burke, whom we discuss in Chapter 5, was sometimes vilified by opponents, and liberal theorists like eighteenth-century writer Mary Wollstonecraft (discussed in Chapter 7) have been ridiculed for challenging contemporaries to throw off their shackles, to live boldly, and create a life beyond the cave. Whenever theorists ask questions about the normative issues of politics, offering paths out of the cave, they enter controversial territory, as we see in the following sections.

SOME FUNDAMENTAL ETHICAL QUESTIONS IN POLITICS

What Purpose Should the State Serve?

One of the oldest questions of political theory is, What purpose should the state serve? The range of possible answers is enormous. We can examine the teachings of Plato and Thomas Hobbes to find two vastly different approaches to confronting this issue. In *The Republic,* Plato suggests that the highest purpose of the state is the promotion of justice and that the best form of state is one that pursues

justice. Justice is presented as *following nature.* Plato explains that following your nature means being true to the person you are. It is doing what is natural, honest, correct for yourself.[2] It is following your natural calling, your natural purpose.

Moreover, when each person is acting justly, the state itself is just. As Plato saw it, if each person followed his or her nature, individuals would divide themselves into three basic groups. In *The Republic,* he elaborates on these three natural groups. Some people would naturally be inclined to pursue manual labor and would become workers; others would naturally be drawn to careers involving physical danger and would become auxiliaries (military leaders); and others would naturally be interested in and good at public service and policymaking and would, therefore, enter the class of guardians (rulers). Plato believed that philosophers would be naturally suited to comprise the group of guardians, insofar as philosophers most fully pursue the life of reason. In this discussion of justice, the most important consideration, for Plato, was that each person do what is natural and therefore enter the group consistent with his or her natural inclinations, talents, and abilities.

Plato defined injustice as acting contrary to nature.[3] Thus if someone is naturally suited to become a member of the auxiliary but seeks to move into the class of rulers, this is unjust. If someone, by nature, is fit to be a worker, but wishes to rise up into the class of guardians, this is unjust. Moving out of the grouping into which nature suits you puts you at war with justice. Interestingly, we see here that Plato warns against ambition, upward or downward mobility, and doing something simply because it is popular or simply because you have the power to do it. Each of these actions can lead us away from our nature and bring unhappiness to ourselves and harm to the state.[4]

Notice that Plato's theory criticizes the very striving for advancement, the competition to best your peers in as many fields of endeavor as you physically and mentally can, and the ambition for ever-greater achievements in every area of life—all of which U.S. culture praises. If we listen to Plato, we may begin to look askance at such approaches to life. We may ask whether all avenues of pursuit are natural for all people.

Plato's writings raise fascinating possibilities and have been the subject of innumerable commentaries. Some readers have been appalled by his notion of three social classes into which individuals are placed. Plato strikes some people as hopelessly hierarchical and authoritarian in his thinking. Indeed, Plato was a critic of democracy, for he was convinced that ruling and policymaking were natural talents possessed by some people, but not by all. In making such claims, Plato has not only offended democratic sensibilities but has also struck some commentators as self-serving, insofar as he saw philosophers (like himself) as the class most naturally suited for ruling the perfect state. Yet other students of Plato have seen his criticisms of ambition, competition, and individual self-aggrandizement as compelling antidotes to U.S. culture's message that the only life worth living is the frenzied climb-the-ladder-of-success-to-the-very-top approach to life. Some commentators are moved by Plato's argument that living justly is more important than following personal ambitions. The only thing certain in these interpretations is that Plato will continue to challenge his readers, infuriating some and inspiring others.[5]

In the seventeenth century, English political theorist Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) could equally confound his peers and readers. Hobbes's life spanned the sail-

BOX 4.1 Crime in the United States: Is Hobbes Correct—Does Life Look Brutal and Violent?

In his seventeenth-century masterpiece *Leviathan,* Thomas Hobbes depicts human nature as violent and warlike. Life is uncertain, Hobbes says, because of the human propensity to commit innumerable acts of aggression against persons and property. Thus, without a strong state to control these aggressive tendencies, violence becomes a way of life.

Does the United States look Hobbesian? Consider the following statistics provided by the U.S. Department of Justice for crime levels in 1999:

- 48% of reported murders were committed by people who knew their victims
- 916,383 aggravated assaults were reported
- 1.4 million violent crimes were reported
- $14.8 million in property was reported stolen
- 7,876 hate crimes were reported.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States,* Press Release 15 October 2000 (http://www.fbi.gov/pressrm/presrel00).

ing of the Spanish Armada and the outbreak of religious civil war in England. He was educated at Oxford, lived for a time in Paris and there met philosopher René Descartes, traveled to Italy and met Galileo, and served as a tutor of Charles II. The bluntness of his words sometimes astounded his contemporaries and inspired wild stories. Indeed, John Aubrey recalls that Hobbes had to live with gossip alleging that Hobbes was too paranoid to sleep alone at night in his own home and with rumors that he was a heretic.[6]

In his *Leviathan,* Hobbes tells his readers early on that he has no intention of looking to ancient philosophers such as Plato to understand politics. What is the purpose of the state? According to Hobbes, we cannot know until we have answered another question: What is human nature? To understand human nature, Hobbes concludes, look into your own psyche.[7] When you do this, you'll find passion, desires, fears, aggressive impulses, and instinctive urges to acquire power. However, you will also find an element of rationality. This mixture of passion and reason in human nature must be understood, Hobbes says, if politics itself is to be made comprehensible.

Hobbes proceeds with his analysis by stating that the violent and impulsive components of human nature lead to social conflict. Whenever aggressive human beings live in groups, violence is always a possibility. Moreover, Hobbes believes humans are naturally equal to each other. What leads him to this conclusion? He tells us he has observed weak humans and strong ones and has been struck by the following fact: Even the weakest of humans is capable of killing the strongest. The weak person can launch a sneak attack, wait until the strong person goes to sleep, creep up on a strong person from behind, use cunning and trickery, and manage somehow to kill the strong. Does this not, Hobbes asks, prove that—in terms of the only thing that really matters, that is, staying alive—we are all fundamentally equal?[8] The fact of our equality, coupled with our shared tendencies toward aggression, creates a human condition in which each of us is vulnerable to all others. No one is safe. The strongest can fall at the hands of the weakest.[9]

Our reason shows us the alternative to such a miserable life. Each of us can use our reason to deduce that, were we able to protect ourselves from the dangers posed by all others, we could improve our chances of having a longer and less brutish life. Reason tells us that it is in our self-interest to join with others to create a power over all of us that will have the function of deterring each individual's natural aggressiveness. We will find it rational to create a power that will function in the following manner: It is to leave us alone unless we act aggressively toward another, in which case it is to punish us severely and quickly. Knowing that such severe punishment is certain if we ever commit aggression, we will each be deterred from harming others by our fear of such punishment. At the same time, knowing that the power will leave us alone if we do not act aggressively, we will be able to live full, active, productive lives unencumbered by any unnecessary intrusions from this power.

The power Hobbes describes is the state. In spelling out its reason for being (deterrence), he has also laid the foundations for justifying its existence. Its purpose is to provide security through deterrence and thus *promote the survival of humanity*. Notice how different this argument is from Plato's advocacy of the just state. Hobbes rejects what he considers to be lofty and utopian dreams of achieving a perfectly just state (as Plato would define it) and concentrates, instead, on teaching us the importance of creating a state that can crack down on violence. Without the powerful state capable of enacting, and willing to enact, swift and severe punishment on any and all wrongdoers, each of us is vulnerable to attack from naturally aggressive human beings. Without the powerful state watching over us, we are likely victims in a world of predators.[10] Our choice is clear: We can have a powerful no-nonsense state that will protect us, or we can live desperate and terrified in a violent world in which every single person has the power to kill any of us at any moment.

If this sounds far-fetched and unduly pessimistic, Hobbes argues, think again. In a provocative anticipation of how his critics will assail his low opinions of human nature, Hobbes asks us to think about the following: When you leave your home, do you lock your doors and windows? Thinking like a Hobbesian in terms of the technology of the twenty-first century, do you do the same when you leave your car unattended? If you are at home alone in the evening, do you make certain your doors are locked? When you travel alone, are you mindful (and perhaps suspicious) of strangers you encounter? If you have a child and live close to your child's school, do you allow your child to walk alone to school? Do any of your actions implicitly affirm the violent propensities of which Hobbes writes?[11]

Just as Plato elicits strong reactions, so does Hobbes. Some writers have seen him as pathological. Some have attacked him for justifying what looks like a police state. Some have blamed him for trying to steer political theory away from questions of justice and toward more prosaic issues of law and order. Others have found in Hobbes a cogent argument that governments need to be more concerned with fighting crime and promoting safety. Some have read Hobbes and wished that we did have such a deterrence power, so we could take a peaceful walk in the late evening along city streets or be away from our possessions without worrying so much about theft and vandalism.[12]

Whatever our individual interpretations of Plato and Hobbes may be, their writings convey the complexity of issues in the field of political theory. They help us to begin thinking critically about the purposes of states and about the normative dimensions of governing.

Should States Promote Equality?

Political theorists have disagreed among themselves on many issues relating to equality. There is no agreement on how equality should be defined, nor on the question of whether equality should be actively promoted by state policies. To get a sense of how such disagreements have divided political theorists over the centuries, we can look to the teachings of Aristotle, Thomas Jefferson, Tecumseh, Chico Mendes, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Kurt Vonnegut.

As noted previously, Aristotle was a student of Plato's Academy in the fourth century B.C. Like Plato, he came from a prominent family, and he went on to make his own contributions to ancient Greek culture. Aristotle founded a school, the Lyceum, and his writings spanned the fields of politics, poetry, metaphysics, ethics, and science. Aristotle was also a teacher of Alexander the Great.

Aristotle's *Politics* offers astute insights on the issue of equality. Reading Aristotle's observations gives us an opportunity to think about what equality implies. Aristotle notes that it can imply any number of things. He advises that equality best serves human beings when equality is understood to mean *equal consideration of interests*. So defined, equality should be promoted by states. In explaining equal consideration of interests, Aristotle asks us to consider the different forms states can assume. He identifies six such forms: monarchy, aristocracy, polity, tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy. Each form is defined by two elements: who rules and whose interests are considered and served. Viewing each form of state on the basis of these two criteria, Aristotle outlines the following definitions:

- *Monarchy*: Rule by one in the interests of all
- *Aristocracy*: Rule by the few in the interests of all
- *Polity*: Rule by the many in the interests of all
- *Tyranny*: Rule by one in the interests of the ruler
- *Oligarchy*: Rule by the few in the interests of the rulers
- *Democracy*: Rule by the many in the interests of the rulers

According to Aristotle, monarchy, aristocracy, and polity are all proper forms of government because each treats all interests as meriting consideration. No interests are excluded from consideration. In these three forms of government, no matter how many people are involved in the process of ruling, the interests of all are served by the state. Aristotle considered tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy to be improper forms of government, because interests were not equally considered. Under tyranny, the interest of the leader is elevated above all others. In an oligarchy, the few who hold power pursue their interests to the exclusion of the interest of the many. In democracy, the many have power, but they act like tyrants. They rule in a self-serving manner and exclude from consideration the interest of the few. That is, each of the improper forms of government violates the principle of equal consideration of interests. Each improper form discriminates against or oppresses another group.

Interestingly, for Aristotle, therefore, it is less important to have equal participation in the *process* of decision making than it is to have equality reflected in the *results* of the decision arrived at. This contrast is very striking in his comparison of monarchies and democracies. If one defined equality in terms of participation, democracies might look more ethical than monarchies. In Aristotle's definition, a democratic society is one in which most people are participating in ruling, so there is, at least, an approximation of participation on an equal basis (all people have the same or equal participation rights). However, in a monarchy equality of participation is altogether absent: One person is doing all the ruling.

Yet Aristotle favors monarchy over democracy. Does this make sense? Think about the following hypothetical scenarios. Suppose that, in your class, you and your fellow students are given the opportunity to vote on the following proposition: Every person who is right-handed gets 10 bonus points on the next exam, but only if everyone who is left-handed loses 20 points on the same exam. Suppose a majority of the class is right-handed. Suppose that most students show up to class on the day of the vote and cast a vote on the proposition. If the majority of right-handed students swings the vote in favor of the proposition benefiting them, this would represent an example of democracy, as defined as Aristotle. The majority is ruling, but it is doing so in a self-serving manner. The result of the decision made by the majority does not give equal consideration to the interests of the minority. Indeed, the decision imposes "exam points discrimination" on the minority.

Contrast this situation with one in which a single ruler is in charge of the class, makes decisions regarding point distributions on exams, and those decisions make no distinctions between right-handed and left-handed students but, rather, treat all students equally according to the same set of rules. That would represent Aristotle's understanding of monarchy: There is no equality in the process of decision making, but there is equality in the result of the decision. To Aristotle, it is obvious which is more important.[13] Note that he has not advocated equality of income, equality of power, or even equality of rights (he does not uphold equal rights of participation in politics in his definition of legitimate states). His assessment of state responsibilities in the area of equality is focused on interest. Good states serve the public's interest, not *most* of the public's interest, but the interest of the *entire* public (the interests of the many *and* the few).

Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) offers a contrasting view of the nature of equality. Jefferson's contributions to U.S. politics are many and varied. He served in the Virginia colonial legislature, was a delegate to the Continental Congress, was governor of Virginia, served as the first secretary of state, and was elected the third president of the United States. He was also the primary author of the Declaration of Independence, which in 1776 made the argument for American independence from England. We can examine this document to find a theory that conceptualizes equality in terms of *equality of natural rights*. The Declaration's political theory is straightforward. It states that (1) individuals are created naturally equal; (2) individuals possess natural rights; (3) it is the proper role of government to protect and respect these natural rights; and (4) if governments aggress against these equal natural rights, individuals may overturn such governments.[14]

Jefferson's political theory has been the subject of much controversy. Many critics have highlighted the fact that Jefferson owned slaves and that the practice of

slavery and the exclusion of political rights for other groups (women and Native Americans, for example) during this period calls into question the integrity of the Declaration. That the theory of equality in the Declaration was selectively applied and was not extended to African-Americans, Native Americans, and women is indisputable. But what was this theory that was applied so selectively?

First, we see that the theory is essentially anti-Aristotelian, in that equality is discussed not in terms of political results, but in terms of human essences. If Jefferson is correct, equality is not to be viewed as an attribute of decisions, but instead is to be seen as an attribute of people. People, by their very (human) nature, possess equality of natural rights. Indeed, in calling the rights *natural,* the Declaration emphasizes that they were a part of human nature itself. Having the right to life, liberty, and happiness is a fundamental part of being a human being, Jefferson's followers insist, just as much a core element of our essence as is possessing a mind, a heart, and, some would say, a soul. Insofar as each of us is equally human, none of us possess these rights to a greater or lesser extent than others. It is in this sense that the rights are equal. Because these rights are a part of our very nature, who is government to deny them or take them away? It is a fundamental duty of the state to protect these rights, Jefferson claims. Hence, the Declaration proclaims the morality of revolution against a government that would deny the existence of these naturally existing rights.

It is instructive to note that theories of equality of natural rights similar to Jefferson's have been embraced by groups that elites like Jefferson were hesitant or unwilling to accept as social and legal equals. Tecumseh (1768?–1813) was a Shawnee theorist who, in the early nineteenth century, argued for *equality of natural rights with an emphasis on property rights.* Born in Ohio, Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa founded Prophet's Town, Indiana, in 1808. As a political thinker and activist, Tecumseh argued that native lands transferred to whites through treaties negotiated with Native American leaders should be recovered by Native Americans on the basis of natural equality doctrines. Specifically, Tecumseh taught that a spiritual force placed Native Americans on their lands and that each member of the Native American community had an equal and natural right to the lands.[15]

Native American leaders, therefore, had no authority to negotiate away the land, and such negotiations as had occurred should be considered invalid. Note the similarity to Jefferson's theory. Equality, as Tecumseh conceptualizes, is an attribute (a right) of people.

Through his activism and political writings, Chico Mendes (1944–1988) articulated a concept of *equality of participation.* Mendes was a rubber-tapper and union activist in the Brazilian state of Acre. Mendes, like many other indigenous people in the Brazilian rain forest, depended on the forest's products for his life. He worked in the forest harvesting latex from rubber trees in a part of Brazil that remained largely isolated until the mid-1980s. When road construction made the area more accessible, cattle ranchers and others saw the forest as a prime target for clearing and developing. For the rubber-tappers, the threatened loss of forest spelled the end of their traditional livelihood. Mendes and others mobilized and demanded equality of participation in the decision-making process regarding the rain forest. Mendes and other rubber-tappers pointed out that no one knew the

rain forest as well as the people who lived in it. Assisted by international environmentalist groups, who were interested in preventing the deforestation threatened by the cattle industry and developers, Mendes and organizations of rubber-tappers advocated the development of land set-asides; that is, land protected from development. These protected areas would remain regions in which native communities could pursue traditional means of work—such as extracting rubber and collecting native products such as brazil nuts, jute, and palm oil—while the region as a unit would be guaranteed protection from deforestation. Resources within the area would be extracted, but the area's ecological integrity would be preserved. Although Mendes was successful in contributing to the development of the forest protection, he paid dearly for his activism. He was murdered in 1988.[16]

Mendes's concept of equality, like Jefferson's and Tecumseh's, is anti-Aristotelian. According to Mendes and the rubber-tappers, equality in the *process* of decision making is the only way to ensure equality of results. If no one understands the life of the rubber-tapper as well as the rubber-tapper him- or herself, how can someone else, in Aristotelian fashion, determine, consider, and then serve the interest of the rubber-tapper? Cattle ranchers and developers could not be trusted to serve the tappers' interest, nor could environmentalists. When the developers saw the forest, they saw future roads, clearings, and concrete; when the environmentalists looked at it, they saw a near-pristine environmental utopia they wanted to set off as wild and as free of human (including tapper) traces as possible. Neither saw what Mendes saw: a forest that should neither be destroyed nor romanticized. How could either group speak for the rubber-tappers? They could not. The only legitimate solution was equality of participation by all groups speaking for themselves. Mendes's example suggests the importance of thinking critically about what interests are and who is in a position to recognize and serve interests.

As distinctive as the approaches of Aristotle, Jefferson, Tecumseh, and Mendes are, they do share the position that equality is a desirable political goal for individuals and governments. However, what if the pursuit of equality were harmful? Powerful insights into this perspective are found in the writings of nineteenth-century German theorist Friedrich Nietzsche and contemporary U.S. writer Kurt Vonnegut.

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) is perhaps one of the most controversial political theorists in the modern period. Nietzsche, a professor of classical philology at the University of Basel, was a prolific writer whose works included treatises on ancient Greece, philosophy, linguistics, religion, and politics. Nietzsche's writings continue to incite controversy, for one finds in them a provocative theory of the harmful consequences of egalitarianism, along with various commentaries on the death of god, the pettiness associated with religious beliefs, and the lies that make up the teachings of traditional morality. These arguments made by Nietzsche, whose father was a Lutheran minister, have brought him notoriety.

What is Nietzsche's argument? He maintained that equality, as a concept, is rooted in a certain type of morality. He termed this morality a *slave morality,* which he defined as a morality articulated by the weak and thus designed to serve the interests of the weak. Slave moralities are contrasted with *master moralities,* ethical

codes that serve the strong and praise the attributes of strength, conquering, ruling, and dominating. Slave moralities condemn as "bad" what is called "good" by master moralities. Master moralities call "bad" what is termed "good" by slave moralities. Notice the logic of Nietzsche's assertions. Both forms of morality are self-serving in the manner in which they determine what is "good" and what is "bad." Neither morality provides a concept of good or bad that exists beyond its own context.[17]

Christianity, according to Nietzsche, is an example of a slave morality, in that it teaches forgiveness, humility, and meekness. Nietzsche introduces the concept of resentment to make the argument that advocates of slave morality seek a vengeful retribution against those who are strong. How does all this make sense? Nietzsche ties the strains of his thought together by concluding that slave morality appeals to the desire of those who are weak to bring down the strong (because the weak resent the strong) by condemning as "bad" all those things that make the strong powerful (such as the drive to conquer and dominate). For example, Christians resent the powerful, so they condemn as "sinful" the traits of the powerful and then fancy the powerful burning in hell, taking delight in the imagined torments of the powerful because Christians deeply resent the powerful and love the idea of the powerful being made to suffer.

Equality is a part of slave morality. The weak uphold equality as "good" and "ethical" because they want to destroy the privileged positions of the powerful. Equality, as Nietzsche sees it, is a buzzword for people who want to destroy those who have risen above them. Democracy, from a Nietzschean perspective, is an example of slave morality, if it preaches that none should be privileged above others. What is behind the demand for equality? If Nietzsche is correct, resentment is behind it, the drive to punish those who excel, those who rise to the top, and those who climb to powerful positions. These people are to be punished by being defined as "bad" under the terms of a slave morality. "Goodness" ensues when all are brought down to the same level, because that is when all are equal.

Nietzsche's writings have horrified some readers, who see his work as an argument for elitism or perhaps domination. Insofar as his writings expose the flaws of egalitarianism, some commentators see Nietzsche as a precursor of antidemocratic movements such as Nazism, which is discussed in Chapter 6. Nietzsche's sister Elizabeth, who edited some of his works, had close ties with the Nazis. Other writers see a different meaning in Nietzsche's philosophy. They point out that, when Nietzsche took pains to uncover the vengeful motives behind the slave morality, he was not doing so to glorify the master morality. Rather, he was making the logical point that both moral systems serve interests: Master morality serves the interest of those who need to legitimize their position of dominance, whereas slave morality serves the purposes of those who need to delegitimize dominance and legitimize equality.[18]

In 1961 U.S. author Kurt Vonnegut published a short story, "Harrison Bergeron," in which characters and plot twists offer a fictional laboratory for examining Nietzschean concepts. In this story, set in the United States in the year 2081, laws have made everyone thoroughly and completely equal. If one person begins to look unequal in comparison to any other, the inequality is cured swiftly. For

example, people who are smarter than others are made to wear devices that impede their ability to use their intelligence to compete and do things better than anyone else. Individuals who are physically stronger than others are similarly required to wear "equalizing" gear so that they do not climb above the equal level of all others. In the story, the major character Harrison is naturally gifted in terms of intellect and physical strength, so he is made "equal" to all others by being forced to wear radio devices that pump noises into his ears to disrupt his thinking, thick glasses so he cannot unfairly read more than others, and weights to tie him down physically so he is weakened and made equal to others. The government uses a Handicapper-General to enforce the rule that all such gifted people never throw off their equalizing radios, glasses, and weights. Because nobody is allowed to be superior to another in any way, people are thoroughly equal, but society is characterized by mediocrity, conformity, and drabness. The zealous pursuit of equality has robbed society of genius, creativity, excellence, and noble accomplishments. Anyone with talent is penalized by handicapping devices, so talent is wasted.[19]

In Vonnegut's story, we can see various Nietzschean themes. First, equality becomes a basis for attacking those who would use their talents to become strong or intellectually dominant. The drive for equality means that the Handicapper-General enforces rules prohibiting anyone from rising above the "average" level. Second, equality is exposed as being a self-serving position; as a Nietzschean would say, equality is not a neutral concept, but rather is a concept that harms some and favors others. In the short story, those who would not be able to successfully compete with the naturally gifted and strong Harrison are protected from having to do so by his radio, glasses, and weights. Harrison is harmed in the interest of their well-being.

We can look to Vonnegut's story as we think critically about several questions relating to the normative basis of equality:

- Is it possible to equalize all without harming some?
- Should individuals be equal in every way?
- Should laws pursue equality so diligently that laws provide for equality of capabilities rather than equality of opportunities?
- Can equality become a basis for oppression?

From Aristotle to Vonnegut, we see writers struggling with these questions. As you consider this ethical dimension of politics, think about which arguments you find most compelling. Is equality humane if it is viewed as equal consideration of all interests (Aristotle) but not if equality is imposed on people as a means of denying them the use of their individual talents (Vonnegut)? Is equality of results (Aristotle) more important than equality of processes (Mendes)? Is equality a linguistic and conceptual weapon whereby one group pursues advantages relative to another (Nietzsche), or is equality a fundamental natural attribute of human beings (Jefferson and Tecumseh)? In the next chapter, we take up the issue of equality again, and explore how conservatism, liberalism, and other contemporary forms of applied theory try to sort out these questions and present their own views of equality through the medium of political platforms.

Should States Be Organized to Maximize Their Own Power or Organized to Restrain This Power?

Are citizens better off living under a state that holds great power it can employ at home or abroad in a swift and decisive manner whenever a conflict may arise, or is it better to live under a state that is organized to prevent state leaders from having at their command such overwhelming amounts of power? This question has puzzled and divided political theorists for centuries.

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) presents an argument in favor of state organization for the purpose of maximizing state power in his classic work *The Prince*. Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* during the years 1512 and 1513, when he was exiled from politics and seeking to gain favor with the government of the city-state Florence. Indeed, he dedicated *The Prince* as a gift to Lorenzo de Medici, Florence's leader. Italy was divided into various warring and competing factions at this time, and Machiavelli hoped *The Prince* could offer the political wisdom needed to create order in the region. *The Prince* would tell Lorenzo how to be a powerful statesman, one who could best his enemies and maintain sovereignty over his lands. In the process of teaching these lessons, *The Prince* articulates for readers a complex and detailed blueprint for organizing states in a manner to seize and maintain power. As such, despite Machiavelli's other writings in favor of popular rule and limited government, *The Prince* has survived through the centuries to become a classic text on the mechanics of state power and it has earned Machiavelli the reputation for justifying a "win at any cost" approach to governing.[20]

Read as a text for strong centralized leaders, *The Prince* recommends that states are most effective at maximizing their power if organized along the following lines. If possible, states should use cultural traditions and long-standing folkways to justify their use of power. If a state needs to attack an enemy, it is best to use religious or cultural symbols to legitimize the attack. Attack, but claim the attack is consistent with God's will, for example. This will win support for the state's actions. In addition, when a state seeks to expand its territory, it may be useful to colonize new territories in order to control them. In colonizing a territory, the state should move its own people into the land and confiscate land from the conquered population. Through these actions, the conquered population will be rendered too powerless to resist the state. Conquered peoples will suffer from such actions, but this is not necessarily bad. The suffering can be very useful, for it can serve as a visible warning of how the state can crush people at will.

Furthermore, a state must not allow its own populations to grow powerful enough to threaten the state itself. Thus Machiavelli justifies state action to weaken economic classes to prevent them from becoming powerful rivals of state officials, and he also suggests that states keep their general population in fear. In a revealing discussion of whether it is better for states to be hated, feared, or loved by their own people, Machiavelli decides that fear is the optimum basis for ruling. The reason is as follows: A population that hates the state may rise up against it (and this would obviously impair the state's power if the revolt were successful), and a population that loves the state is uncontrollable (people give or withhold love of their own choosing, Machiavelli says, and thus it is impossible to *make* people love you), but a population that fears the state is controllable by the state

(fear, unlike love, can be induced by the state and the levels of fear can be lowered or raised depending on the state's needs). For this reason, Machiavelli teaches, states maximize and secure their power if they rule through fear.

Indeed, rulers should use just the right amount of cruelty against their own citizens, so that fear is created but popular vengefulness against the government is not. Use cruelty to make citizens fear politicians but not hate them, Machiavelli advised. A state so organized can maintain order and peace within its own borders. States that build up reserves of power and keep maximum power for ready use at any time are states that best provide protection and security to their own people. Thus, Machiavielli's work teaches, in being cruel the state is really being kind.[21]

Yet states that mobilize power so it can be used so extensively at home and abroad also possess the power to tyrannize over their own populations, according to some theorists. We may look to James Madison (1751–1836) to find a very different perspective on state organization. Madison was a member of the U.S. Continental Congress and the U.S. Congress, and was elected the fourth president of the United States. He was one of the authors of the U.S. Constitution and, along with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, an author of *The Federalist Papers* (1787–1788). As discussed in Chapter 3, *The Federalist Papers* was a series of articles that argued on behalf of the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. *The Federalist Papers,* like Machiavelli's *The Prince,* is a work that has endured beyond the original events inspiring its writing. *The Federalist Papers* presents what many readers have found a logically compelling argument for organizing states in such a manner as to restrict state power.

Madison argues that states should intentionally restrict their powers by a means of the institution of a *separation of powers* and a system of *checks and balances*. With respect to the former, Madison writes, legislative, executive, and judicial power must be divided among three different branches of government. If one branch is organized in such a manner as to hold all three powers, this branch becomes politically dangerous.[22] Such a branch is potentially tyrannical, Madison believes, because it possesses the power to make laws, enforce laws, and settle disputes on laws. Its power is final and absolute. Rather than concentrating all power in one branch, it is better to have one branch make laws (the legislature), one branch enforce laws (the executive), and still another branch settle disputes over the meaning of laws (the judiciary).

Separation of powers should be accompanied by a system of checks and balances, according to Madison. One branch should have the ability to obstruct the activities of a rival branch. This would have the effect of restricting state power even more than the separation of powers alone, because it would allow the branches to *weaken* each other. The executive can weaken the legislature by means of a veto, whereas the legislature can weaken the executive by voting to override the veto. The judiciary can weaken either the legislature or executive by declaring legislative or executive actions unconstitutional by virtue of the power of judicial review, but the judiciary can also be weakened by the other two branches because the executive appoints and the legislature approves members to the highest court in the judiciary (that is, the U.S. Supreme Court).[23]

A Madisonian state is designed to shut down if its leaders ever consider imposing Machiavellian cruelties on the domestic population. An executive seeking

to hold the citizenry in fear, for example, would be thwarted by one of the other two branches, if the system worked properly. A legislature bent on controlling the population through extensive regulations would similarly be "checked and balanced" and thus defeated in its endeavor. Notice how striking are the differences separating the logic of *The Prince* and that of *The Federalist Papers*. One was written in a period of chaos with the stated purpose of creating order through the actions of strong political leaders (*The Prince*), the other was composed to justify a constitution creating a new government for a people who had recently revolted against a colonial power. Emphasizing different objectives, both *The Prince* and *The Federalist Papers* raise important questions about the ethics of political leadership. Which is more important, these works ask us to ponder, protecting citizens *from government* through an organizational mode that restricts power, or protecting citizens *by government* through an organizational mode that maximizes the power of the protector?

Should States Try to Help Us Be Ethical?

When issues of ethics arise, is it best if the state leaves ethical decisions, as much as possible, to be decided by individuals; or should states take positions on ethical issues, decide what is ethical, and insist that citizens live consistent with the ethical positions taken by the state? Who is to decide what is ethical—individuals or states? Perhaps no normative question in political science is more difficult to resolve. On the one hand, states routinely enforce ethical positions. For instance, when states pass and enforce laws against murder, assault, theft, and other actions defined as crimes, states are imposing ethical codes on the population. On the other hand, we may look to the history of political theory to see that philosophers have disagreed on whether such enforcement should be as limited as possible or as extensive as possible. Some theorists have taken the position that states should seek to stay out of the moral decisions of individuals, whereas others have said that states should be intimately involved with this decision making.

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) was an English philosopher whose works upheld the view that individuals should be allowed to judge ethical questions for themselves. According to Mill, governments should not interfere with individuals unless individuals posed a threat to others. Mill rejected the notion that government knows best. In short, Mill defended the widest possible range of individual freedom of thought and action.[24]

For example, if government and society suspected an individual's beliefs to be wrong, government and society still had an obligation to respect the individual's right to believe anything, as long as the individual did not harm others. Indeed, Mill wrote, people should have as much freedom to be wrong as to be right in their beliefs. In fact, he called on society to respect the individual's right to think any thought no matter how outrageous or unpopular.[25] The implications of Mill's argument are clear: Governments should not try to make individuals ethical, nor should governments become involved in individual lives to protect individuals from incorrect opinions.

Everyone benefits if government removes itself from questions of personal morality, according to Mill. Individuals benefit because they possess the liberty to

live their lives as they please. Society also benefits because society gains whenever it encourages freethinkers to express themselves and explore new ideas. These far-sighted individuals can formulate bold and innovative approaches for moving societies forward. In fact, Mill was convinced that progress is made by people who refuse to accept conventional ways of thinking and acting. From Socrates on, Mill argued, iconoclastic thinkers have challenged traditional notions of ethics and have offered original insights on social and political problems.[26]

Yet what if an individual upholds an idea that appears destructive? What if a person upholds, for example, racism? What if the individual in question expresses his or her racism through public speeches and publications? Should society step in and try to stop the spread of this antihumanist idea? Mill considered the question of whether the consequences for society are harmful whenever individuals express erroneous opinions. After giving this question considerable thought, Mill concluded that the expression of incorrect ideas can also benefit society, in that the expression of error can give people a clearer view of what error looks like.[27] That is, one of the best ways of exposing error is to let proponents of error speak and show themselves to be charlatans. Thus, however tempting it may be, states should avoid the role of moral guardian.[28]

Mill's ideas are dangerous and are to be rejected, according to many religious fundamentalist political theorists. Fundamentalism—whether Christian, Islamic or from a different faith tradition—upholds what it defines as religious truth: basic (fundamental) propositions that are validated by the religion itself. Fundamentalists are often described as ultraorthodox, that is, as advocates of what they regard as a strict, nonsyncretic approach to religious observance, an observance that claims not to dilute the purity and literalism of religious teachings by incorporating secular and competing religious practices into the original faith.

Fundamentalism includes a highly diversified and multidimensional range of political perspectives. In the United States, fundamentalism has often defined itself in opposition to science as well as to what it regards as secular forces seeking to alter traditional family structures, whereas in the Middle East and Central Asia fundamentalists have often been critics of international power structures seen as imperialistic.[29]

Despite variations in fundamentalist theory and practice, fundamentalists tend to assert that (1) religious truth is authoritative; (2) religious truth is compelling and not to be disregarded or reduced to being a mere option; and (3) if fundamentalism is to guide government policy, laws must codify the authoritative truths of the religion, not assume a posture of neutrality or silence on the issues of politics.

We can look to the teachings of the Afghan Taliban movement and the writings of Patrick J. Buchanan (born 1938) to see specific examples of fundamentalist critiques of Millian perspectives on state–morality relations.

The Taliban became the governing power in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s, holding power in parts of the country in 1994 and extending its range of control through the remainder of the decade. In November 2000, the Taliban forces were reported to have 95% of the country under their control.[30]

The name Taliban means "students of Islam" and the Taliban's governing policies have reflected its particular fundamentalist view of Islam filtered through the perspectives afforded by Pashtun culture. The Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan and the ethnic group from which the Taliban movement has

drawn many of its supporters. Long-time student of Afghan politics Ahmed Rashid has noted that before the rise of the Taliban, Afghanistan was a religiously tolerant society in which the Sunni Muslim majority coexisted with Sufis, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jews. Although divided by clan and ethnic divisions and complicated by the maneuverings of superpower and regional rivalries, Afghanistan's political process was not characterized by religious persecution.[31]

Taliban fundamentalism draws its intellectual origins from deobandism, a school within Sunni Hanafi Islam that many Taliban members learned from Pakistani religious leaders. This theology opposes the equality of women with men and also rejects tribal and clan authority in favor of religious authority. Both positions, according to Rashid, have been interpreted by the Taliban in purist, extremist fashions that violate the integrity of the religion. Not surprisingly, Muslims have been among the harshest critics of the Taliban forces. Many U.S. readers may be shocked to learn that the Clinton administration was among the Taliban's earliest supporters.[32]

What type of policies have been implemented by Taliban leaders? Decrees requiring men to grow beards, forbidding girls and women from attending school and forbidding women to practice most professions, restricting women from traveling in public without religious attire and without male escorts. Taliban decrees have also banned most games, photography, American hairdos, and nonreligious holiday observances. All these provisions are presented by the Taliban as being required by religion, even though, for example, in cities like Kabul, citizens were accustomed to a workforce and a civil society open to women as well as men. Indeed, before the Taliban took power, 40 percent of the physicians and 70 percent of the teachers in Kabul were women.[33]

Many of the country's women have resisted Taliban restrictions. The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) has helped women learn skills such as weaving in order to empower women to work in their homes beyond the restrictive surveillance of Taliban officials. RAWA has also defied the Taliban by running underground schools for girls inside Afghanistan and by teaching both girls and boys in refugee camps. Distancing themselves not only from Taliban actions but also from the fundamentalist foundations, RAWA has the following motto: "If you are freedom loving and antifundamentalist, you are with RAWA."[34] You can find this motto and information on its latest actions by going to its Web site (http://www.rawa.org).

The anti-Millian perspectives of the Taliban are obvious. They are no less obvious in the fundamentalist politics of U.S. activist and 2000 Reform Party presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan. According to Buchanan, truly legitimate ethical positions are based on religion and these positions should be expressed and enforced through a state's laws. In the United States, citizens have been turning away from religious-oriented ethics, Buchanan believes, and the result has been a crisis of morality. Following the teachings of the Christian Bible is the only way out of this crisis, Buchanan insists, for no source other than the Bible is legitimate as a foundation of law.[35]

Buchanan rejects the idea of tolerating all viewpoints. Government should not be neutral on issues, but rather should uphold the moral position on policy questions. Thus homosexuality should be identified for the sin it is, as should abortion and illegal drug use, Buchanan contends. Buchanan calls on citizens to exercise a

profoundly important duty: Pressure politicians to rewrite the laws to encode fundamentalist teachings on all social, political, and economic matters.[36]

In the United States, questions of which normative approaches are to prevail—Millian ones or fundamentalist ones—arise with great frequency. In 1993, the state of Texas sought to confiscate documents from the Texas Knights of the Ku Klux Klan as a means of investigating Klan protesters who opposed a integration policy implemented in Vidor, Texas. The state of Texas claimed the Klan's actions were harmful, and government officials wanted to confiscate membership information in order to better monitor and restrict the organization. The state of Texas was opposed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), an organization long-known for upholding a Millian position on matters of personal ethics. ACLU staff assisted the Klan in protecting its records, not because it believed in the Klan's racism, but because it believed in keeping government out of questions of personal morality. People have the right to subscribe to any idea, the ACLU affirmed, and their right to be free in choosing their own ethical worldview must be respected. In the words of the ACLU attorney working on the case, one should not say that the constitutional protection of freedom of speech applies to some groups but not to others.[37]

Should all ideas be equally tolerated, as this attorney advises? Consider the following disputes subsequent to the preceding example from Texas. In spring 1994, Howard University was criticized by some for sponsoring a speech by Khalid Abdul Muhammad, who had earlier delivered an anti-Semitic speech at Kean College. Should Howard have sponsored a speaker who had expressed support for anti-Semitism? In 1995, a father took nude photographs of his daughter as part of a project for an art class, but was jailed for endangering his child. Were his photographs pornographic, insofar as they were pictures of a nude child, and if so, should this activity be allowed or discouraged? Is one position on the question of photographs of nude children more ethical than another, and should the state (through the powers of arresting and prosecuting the man) uphold morality? In 1995, the Red Cross decided to be intentionally vague in its discussion of certain sexual practices in documents it distributed on AIDS education. Was this a responsible decision? Is a document containing candid discussions of sexuality destructive of divinely inspired morality? In 1996, Families Against Internet Censorship organized to oppose efforts to restrict access to Internet materials deemed by some to be immoral. Is the organization to be applauded for standing up for a John Stuart Mill–like approach to freedom, or is the organization failing to serve its civic duty of promoting truth and morality? In January 2001, the mayor of Gary, Indiana, pushed for stiffer permit laws regulating groups wishing to protest within city limits as a means of trying to prevent the KKK from holding a rally in Gary. Was the mayor protecting democratic cultural values or subverting them?[38]

As these examples illustrate, questions concerning who is to decide what is ethical are unavoidable. Whether one finds Mill or Buchanan most helpful in resolving this issue, clearly these writers do us a great service in highlighting contrasting and provocative aspects of the debate. Whatever our personal understanding of ethics may be, we must all ask ourselves how best to deal with those who would disagree with our understandings of what is ethical. Is it best to uphold no single morality as the absolute truth? Should each person decide morality for him- or herself? If so, are all opinions to be tolerated? Or should we be seeking for an

absolute truth in the religious traditions that have guided humanity for centuries and, on finding this truth, live in conformity with it? If we find such a truth, does our moral integrity not demand that we speak honestly—calling this truth what it is and struggling to uphold it against the errors of those who would deny it? If we live moral lives, does our morality not require that we speak up against immorality wherever we see it? Is ethical interaction a matter of recognizing that, if each person's morality is to be respected, no absolute morality must be imposed on those who would reject it?

Each normative question explored in this chapter is addressed by the political ideologies of liberalism, conservatism, socialism, fascism, feminism, and environmentalism. Now that we have looked to the history of political theory to find some possible ways of thinking critically about these questions, we can turn to the political ideologies just listed. We will see that these ideologies draw on the historical debates we have examined, but they also base their platforms on an analysis of contemporary problems. These ideologies apply the historical, abstract normative questions we have discussed to an understanding of the present and, in so doing, develop proposals on how best to govern.

SUMMING UP

- Political theory is a subfield of political science, which studies normative aspects of politics. In Plato's **allegory of the cave,** we see the process of political theorizing—the process of thinking critically and analytically about the ethical issues that constantly arise in our common, political lives. The Socratic method offers us a means of thinking beyond the boundaries of convention.
- Plato and Hobbes provide radically different perspectives on the role of the state. For Plato, the state must promote justice; for Hobbes, the state's justification is found in its ability to increase the chances of humanity's survival.
- Aristotle, Jefferson, Tecumseh, and Mendes are theorists of equality. Whether you think of equality in a manner reminiscent of Aristotle (equal consideration of interest), Jefferson and Tecumseh (equality of rights), or Mendes (equality of participation), you can find in the teachings of these diverse theorists creative ways to think about and argue in favor of equality. Nietzsche and Vonnegut, in contrast, challenge us to think about the intriguing possibility that government promotion of equality can bring harmful consequences.
- States can be organized to facilitate the use of maximum state power or to curb state power. If Machiavelli is correct, the first type of state—the one that maximizes power—is the more desirable state, because such a state can better protect its citizens. Madison's theory would suggest otherwise, however. If Madison is correct, institutional protections against maximum state power (for example, separation of power) are necessary if citizens are not to be subject to the tyrannical power of Machiavellian states.
- From antipornography laws to antidrug laws, you can find evidence of state policies designed to shape people's choices. Sometimes it appears as though government were trying to make us more ethical. Should this be a goal of

government? On this question John Stuart Mill parts company with fundamentalists such as Taliban members and Patrick J. Buchanan. For Mill, individuals judge best for themselves how to live. For fundamentalists such as Buchanan, governments have an obligation to pass laws that discourage what fundamentalism defines as immoral choices.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is an allegory?
2. Explain Plato's allegory of the cave: What is the setting, who are the characters, and what major events transpire? What does this allegory teach about the process of gaining enlightenment?
3. How does Plato describe justice? What are the three classes residing in the just society? How does Plato describe injustice?
4. What is the purpose of the state according to Hobbes? How does his answer to this question relate to his understanding of human nature?
5. Discuss Aristotle's concept of equality, and relate this concept to the six-part classification of governments outlined by Aristotle. Of the six types of government, which are proper (and why) and which are improper (and why)?
6. Jefferson, Tecumseh, and Mendes teach the benefits of equality; however, each writer may be viewed as anti-Aristotelian in conceptualizing equality. Explain this anti-Aristotelian element in Jefferson, Tecumseh, and Mendes by noting how Jefferson, Tecumseh, and Mendes separately define and explain equality.
7. How do the works of Nietzsche and Vonnegut offer a critique of equality? How does Nietzsche's discussion of equality relate to his analysis of slave morality?
8. How does Machiavelli describe effective states? How does Madison disagree with Machiavelli?
9. Compare and contrast answers given by Mill and the fundamentalists to the following question: Should governments pass laws to make citizens ethical?
10. Discuss three decrees introduced by the Taliban.

FOLLOWING UP THROUGH INTERNET SOURCES

Ethics and Politics:

- Ethics Updates, edited by Lawrence M. Hinman (http://ethics.acusd.edu/index.html). Links to discussions of diverse issues on ethics and politics.
- American Civil Liberties Union (http://www.aclu.org). An organization that follows an approach to ethics and politics similar to John Stuart Mill's theory, emphasizing individualism.
- American Center for Law and Justice (http://www.aclj.org). An organization that follows an approach to ethics and politics similar to fundamentalist theory, emphasizing traditional Christian morality.
- Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) (http://www.rawa.org). Updates, news, and background on RAWA's opposition to Taliban fundamentalist politics.

5

Political Ideologies I

Liberalism, Conservatism, and Socialism

Chapter 4 discussed some of the ethical questions central to the history of political theory. This subfield of political science, focusing on normative issues, is the study of how thinkers have sought to analyze difficult questions relating to such issues as equality, state power, and justice. This chapter continues the examination of political theory but shifts the focus to an analysis of political ideologies. Political ideologies are pragmatic applications of normative theories. Liberalism, conservatism, socialism, fascism, feminism, and environmentalism are examples of political ideologies. Each ideology draws on the history of political theory and seeks to apply the lessons of this history to the present. Thus, many conservatives look to the eighteenth-century writings of Edmund Burke to find solutions to the problems of immorality in politics, just as many socialists look to the nineteenth-century writings of Marx to find solutions to the problem of class conflict under capitalism.[1]

Ideological debates are fascinating testimony to the diversity of the human imagination. We will examine each ideology by looking at its origins and development.

LIBERALISM

Liberalism is a term rooted in the Latin word *liber. Liber* means free. **Liberalism** advocates liberty, another word linguistically related to *liber.*[2] The theoretical roots of liberalism can be found in the seventeenth-century writings of John Locke and