

Passions, Corruption and the Maintenance of Institutions: From Machiavelli to Today

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Thinkers and themes

Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, the Federalists, Bentham, Mill, Rorty and Hayek.

Passions – of citizens, and rulers.

Corruption – of rulers, and citizens.

Passions and reason.

Self-interest and the common interest.

Incentives – shape behaviour.

Education – shape attitudes.

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527)

A politician, not a philosopher.

1498-1512: worked for the Florentine republic.

1512: the Medici take over Florence.

1513: writes *The Prince*.

1517/19: completes *The Discourses*.

1527: died.

1531-2: *The Prince* and *The Discourses*
published.

1559: Machiavelli's works placed on the papal
Index Librorum Prohibitorum.



The Prince

A prince's ends: *mantenere lo stato* and *gloria*.
To reach those ends: *virtú* and *fortuna*.

The Discourses

Civic virtue: the willingness to live, work, fight
and if necessary die for the republic.
Applies to both citizens and leaders.

Rome – Julius Caesar



(Roman republic: 509 BC to 44/27 BC.)

Rome – Cicero, republic



Rome – a military society



Rome – a male-dominated society



Rome – a religious society



Civic virtue of leaders

Brutus sentenced his own sons to death
(Discourses 3.3).

Romulus killed his brother Remus 'for the
common good and not to satisfy his personal
ambition' (D 1.9).

Ordini

Laws, institutions. ('Orders'.)

In Rome, 'good institutions led to good fortune' (D 1.11).

'hunger and poverty make men industrious, and ... laws make them good' (D 1.3).

Men are born, citizens are made, passions are shaped.

Religion

‘the instrument necessary above all others for the maintenance of a civilized state’ (D 1.11).

‘Our religion has glorified humble & contemplative men, rather than men of action.’

This has ‘made the world weak’ and ‘effeminate’, and ‘handed it over ... to the wicked’ (D 2.2).

Virtue – a manly quality!

Corruption

Modern definition of corruption: ‘the misuse of public office for private gain.’

Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.21: ‘We are not born for ourselves alone ... but our country claims ... one part of our birth, our friends another’.

Cognitive corruption (corruption of the mind):
‘if the people had been corrupt, they would not have refused this bribe’ (*Discourses* 3.8).

Ambition

Rome: *ambitus*, the pursuit of public office and acclaim to excess.

Discourses 1.42.1-2 'how easily men are corrupted', how they can be 'blinded by a little ambition'. So, rulers need 'to restrain human appetites and to deprive them of all hope of doing wrong with impunity'.

Faction

‘the corruption with which [a faction] had impregnated the populace’, such that Caesar ‘blinded the masses’ who could not see that they were accepting a tyrant (D 1.17).

Machiavelli, *History of Florence* 2.1: the whole city [of Florence] was corrupted with the division between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

1629: translates Thucydides.

1640 (May): *Elements of Law*.

1640 (Nov): France.

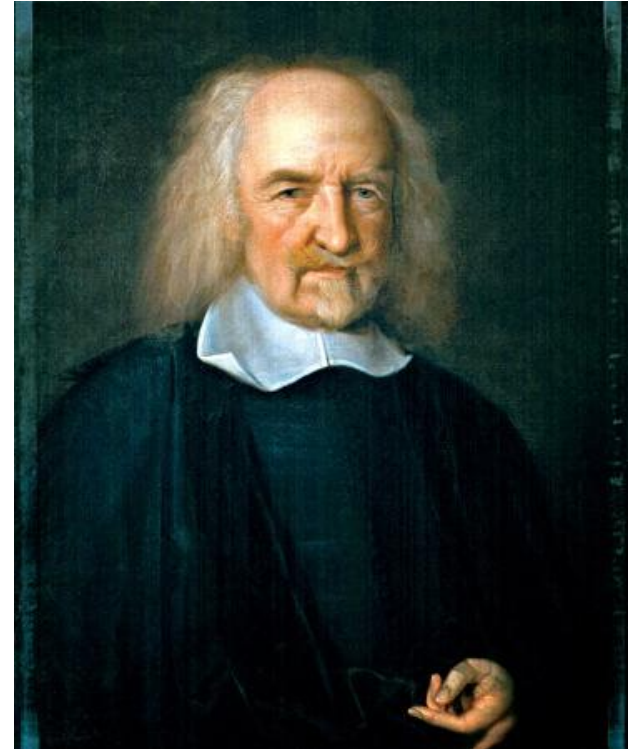
1642/7: *De Cive*.

1651: *Leviathan*.

1652: England.

1655 & 1658: *De Corpore* and *De Homine*.

Late 1660s: *Behemoth*, Latin *Leviathan*.



State of nature

No government.

‘Where there is no common Power, there is no Law: where no Law, no Injustice’ (L 13).

‘every man has a Right to every thing; even to anothers body’ (L 14). ‘But that right of all men to all things, is in effect no better than if no man had right to any thing’ (EL 14.10).

‘... the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short’ (L 13).

Absolutism

Sovereign *can* do whatever he likes.

Sovereign *should not* do so, or he may cause a return to the state of nature.

But that fear, and fear of God's retribution, is the only check on the sovereign:

no constitution no checks & balances

no separation of powers

no re-election no term limits

Monarchy rules

Monarchy is best, democracy is worst.

Hobbes's justification is weak but interesting, e.g. L 19:

- 'the passions of men are commonly more potent than their reason'.
- Therefore, the public interest is most advanced 'where the public and private interest are most closely united'.
- 'in monarchy the private interest is the same [as] the public', e.g. a monarch's riches 'arise only from the riches ... of his subjects'.

Rhetoric and the passions

Democracy tends to become 'an aristocracy of orators' (EL 21.5).

In parliaments, men's passions 'sometimes inflame one another by the hot air of their rhetoric till they set the commonwealth on fire' (LL 25).

Attack on rhetoric and humanism (see Skinner 1996).

Cognitive corruption (Blau 2009). Any of the monarch's counsellors who use rhetoric, not reason, are 'corrupt Counsellours ... bribed by their own [self] interest' (L 25).

Popular corruption

The Civil War happened because ‘the people were corrupted generally’ and were ‘ignorant of their duty’ to obey the sovereign and pay their taxes (*Behemoth* part 1).

Reading Aristotle, Cicero etc. makes men go mad (L 29).

So, ‘before all else the universities are to be reformed’ (LL 30).

Education

The common people's minds are 'like clean paper', fit to receive whatever by public authority shall be printed in them – except for minds which are dependent on the powerful or written on by teachers (L 30).

Hobbes wants to change the images in our heads (Blau 2016).

Reason in practice?

The so-called moral philosophy of writers like Aquinas was merely 'a description of their own passions'.

They 'make the rules of good, and bad, by their own liking, and disliking' (L 46).

Intuition is just an opinion (L 7).

Good and evil

‘Every man ... calls that which pleases ... himself, GOOD; and that EVIL which displeases him Nor is there any such thing as simply good’ (EL 7.3).

L 6: ‘There being **nothing simply and absolutely so**; nor any common rule of good and evil, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the person of the man (where there is no commonwealth;) or (in a commonwealth,) from the person that representeth it’.

Radical subjectivism, then radical legal positivism.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78)

1712 born in Geneva.

1750 *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts.*

1754 *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality.*

1755 *Discourse on Political Economy.*

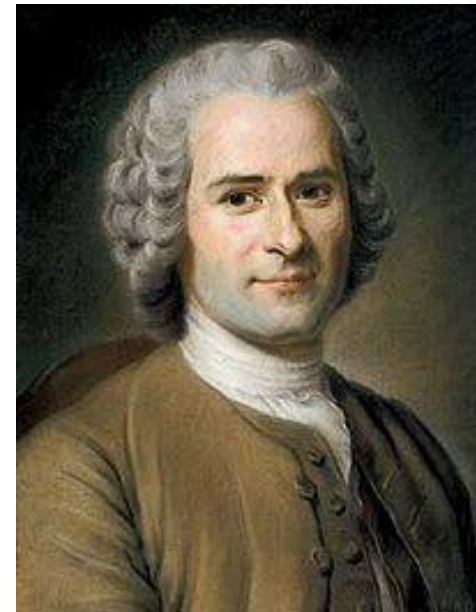
1761 *Julie (La Nouvelle Héloïse).*

1762 *The Social Contract, Emile.*

1766-7 Britain/Hume.

1772 *Considerations on the Government of Poland.*

1778 died



The natural goodness of man

Rousseau's political context (Geneva) led him to criticise Hobbes and Hobbesians.

'Hobbes': man is naturally selfish, and stays like this in society.

Mandeville, Montesquieu etc.: man is naturally selfish but becomes sociable through *doux commerce*.

Rousseau: man is naturally good but becomes corrupted in society. Emile book 4: 'society depraves and perverts men'.

State of nature (DOI)

Amour propre – vanity, a ‘relative feeling’: invidious self-comparison.

We come to see ourselves through others’ eyes.

Gradual transition from state of nature to civil state:

- development of agriculture, division of land, concept of property and justice;
- excessive *amour propre*;
- alienation.

Good citizens

Emile book 1: 'The natural man lives for himself
.... Good social institutions are those best fitted
to make a man unnatural, to exchange his
independence for dependence, to merge the
unit in the group, so that he no longer regards
himself as one, but as a part of the whole, and is
only conscious of the common life. A citizen of
Rome was neither Caius nor Lucius, he was a
Roman; he always loved his country better than
his life.'

Happiness

‘unhappiness consists ... in the disproportion between our desires and our faculties’. Happiness is not about removing/constraining desires, but about getting the right balance between desires and power (E2).

‘Do you know the surest means of making your child miserable? It is to accustom him to getting everything’, which leads to anger when he can’t (E2).

‘How could I conceive that a child thus dominated by anger and devoured by the most angry passions might ever be happy? ... He is a tyrant. He is at once the most vile of slaves and the most miserable of creatures’ (E2).

Education

‘While it is good to know how to use men as they are, it is much better still to make them what one needs them to be’ (DPE).

Lawgiver (TSC 2.7).

Education must give souls a ‘national form’, so that people ‘will be patriotic by inclination, passion, necessity’ (*Considerations on the Government of Poland* ch. 4).

Civic virtue

DPE: 'virtue is ... conformity of the particular will to the general will'. Government must 'make virtue reign'.

TSC 3.15: 'As soon as public service ceases to be the main concern of citizens, and they prefer to serve with money rather than with their person, the State is already close to ruin. Is there a call to battle? They pay troops and stay home. Is there a summons to council? They name Deputies and stay home. Thanks to laziness and money, they finally have soldiers to enslave the fatherland and representatives to sell it. ... Give money, and soon you will have chains.'

Representation

Considerations on the Government of Poland chapter 7.

Representatives are ‘easily corrupted’.

Elections every six weeks.

Precise set of instructions.

‘The Deputy must, with ever word he speaks in the Diet ... anticipate himself under the scrutiny [*sous les yeux*] of his constituents. ... Let them punish their deputies, if necessary let them even cut off their heads’.

Women

Love is a 'social practice ... extolled with much skill and care by women in order to establish their rule and to make dominant the sex that should obey' (DOI).

In *Emile*, Sophie exists for Emile; private/public ends (E5).

Sequel (*Emile et Sophie*).

But in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Julie is wise, Saint-Preux is impassioned.

The Federalists

Alexander Hamilton

James Madison

(John Jay)

The Federalist Papers
(Oct 1787 – May 1788).



The people's passions

Madison, *Federalist* 63: the people, 'stimulated by some irregular passion ... may call for measures which they themselves will afterwards be the most ready to lament and condemn.'

We need a 'respectable body of citizens' – the Senate – to intervene 'until reason, justice and truth, can regain their authority over the public mind'.

Human nature

Madison, *Federalist* 49: 'it is the reason, alone, of the public that ought to control and regulate the government. The passions ought to be controlled and regulated by the government.'

Madison, *Federalist* 51: 'ambition must be made to counteract ambition'.

Madison, *Federalist* 55: in all large assemblies, 'passion never fails to wrest the sceptre from reason. Had every Athenian citizen been a Socrates; every Athenian assembly would still have been a mob.'

- 1. Pessimistic view of human nature.
- 2. Passion a stronger motivating force than reason.
- 3. Institutional design matters.

Representation

Madison, *Federalist 57*: Every constitution should elect ‘men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of the society’, then ‘take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous whilst they continue to hold their public trust.’

Anti-Federalists: have elections every year, in small districts, so that we can pick people *like us*, and so that the legislature should look *like us*.

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)



Utilitarianism

Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Education chapter 1:

1. Pain and pleasure determine what we do (empirical).
2. Pain and pleasure determine what should do (normative).

Government

Constitutional Code Rationale ch. 1: 'The right and proper end of government ... is the greatest happiness of all the individuals of which it is composed. ...

The actual end of government is ... the greatest happiness of those ... by whom the powers of government are exercised.'

Why? Because 'in every human breast, self-regarding interest is predominant over all other interests'.

Solution: need 'the bringing of the particular interest of rulers into accord with the universal interest'.

(Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, Madison.)

Corruption

Moral aptitude is the absence of the universal tendency to sacrifice other interests to one's own interest.

Corruption is opposite (EAO ch. 1).


'Sinister interest': self-interest which conflicts with the common interest. (Machiavelli, Rousseau, Hobbes, Madison.)

Monarch – the 'Corruptor General' – corrupts both representatives and citizens. The 'system of misrule by means of corruption' (CCR ch. 3).

'monarchy and aristocracy above: sham [=fake]
democracy beneath – a slave crouching under both'
(PPR p. 478).

Corruption and action

3 influences on action:

- (a) direct influence of understanding on understanding, i.e. reason;  **'the only honest kind of influence' (PPR)**
- (b) direct influence of will on will, e.g. threats or bribes – 'terrorism';
- (c) indirect influence of understanding on will, e.g. delusion.

'False consciousness.'

When will the rule of 'Custom, the blind tyrant' be removed – 'when will Reason be seated on her throne?' (PRP p. 495).

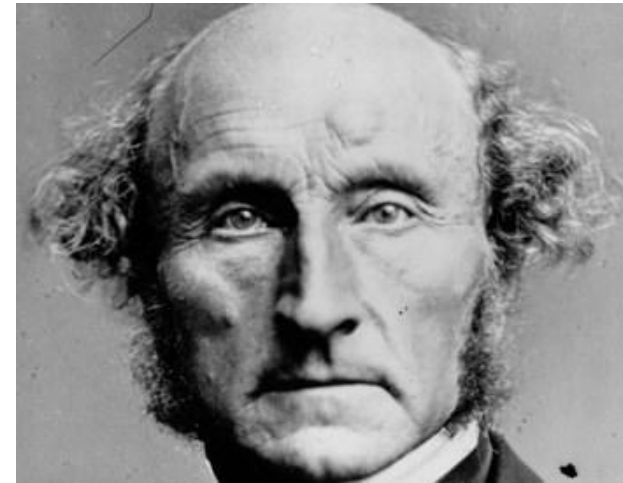
Democracy and representation

Good government requires that rulers be dependent on 'the will of the body of the people' (RRR p. 408).

Constitutional Code:

- recall MPs with 25% of the vote, remove with 50%.
- trumpets!

J.S. Mill



1806: born in London.

1826: 'mental crisis'.

1830: met Harriet Taylor (1851 marriage; 1858 dies).

1843: *A System of Logic*.

1848: *Principles of Political Economy*.

1859: *On Liberty*.

1861: *Utilitarianism, Considerations on Representative Gov.*

1865-8: Liberal MP for Westminster.

1869: *The Subjection of Women*.

1873: died.

Beyond Bentham?

Higher and lower pleasures: 'It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question' (*Utilitarianism* ch. 2).

'Those only are happy ... who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art of pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end' (*Autobiography*, ch. 5).

Utility and selfishness (U ch. 2)

‘In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbour as yourself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality.’

‘laws and social arrangements should place the happiness, or ... the interest, of every individual, as nearly as possible in harmony with the interest of the whole’.

Education and opinion

Education and opinion should 'establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole ... so that not only he may be unable to conceive the possibility of happiness to himself, consistently with conduct opposed to the general good, but also that a direct impulse to promote the general good may be in every individual one of the habitual motives of action'.

Corruption by power

Whenever men have power, their individual interest 'acquires an entirely new degree of importance in their eyes. Finding themselves worshipped by others, they become worshippers of themselves, and think themselves entitled to be counted at a hundred times the value of other people This is the meaning of the universal tradition, grounded on universal experience, of men's being corrupted by power' (*Considerations on Representative Government* ch. 6).

The harm principle (OL 1.9)

‘the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.’

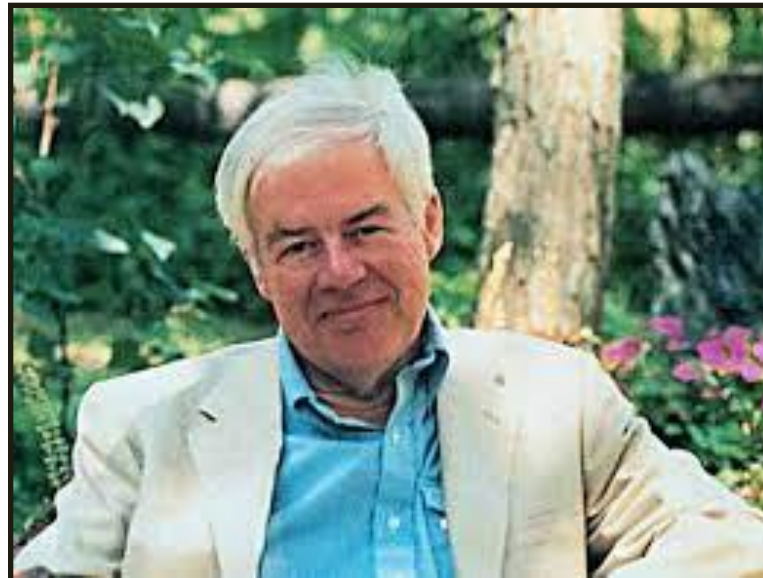
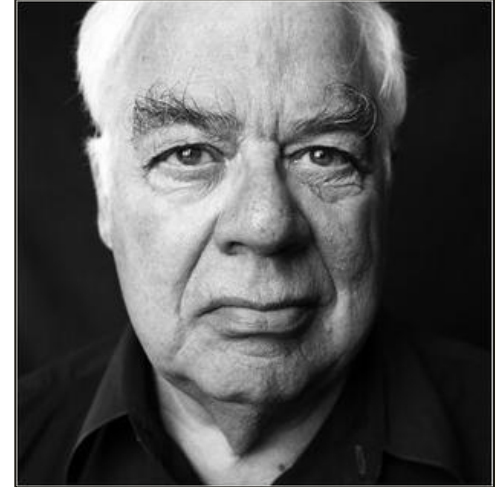
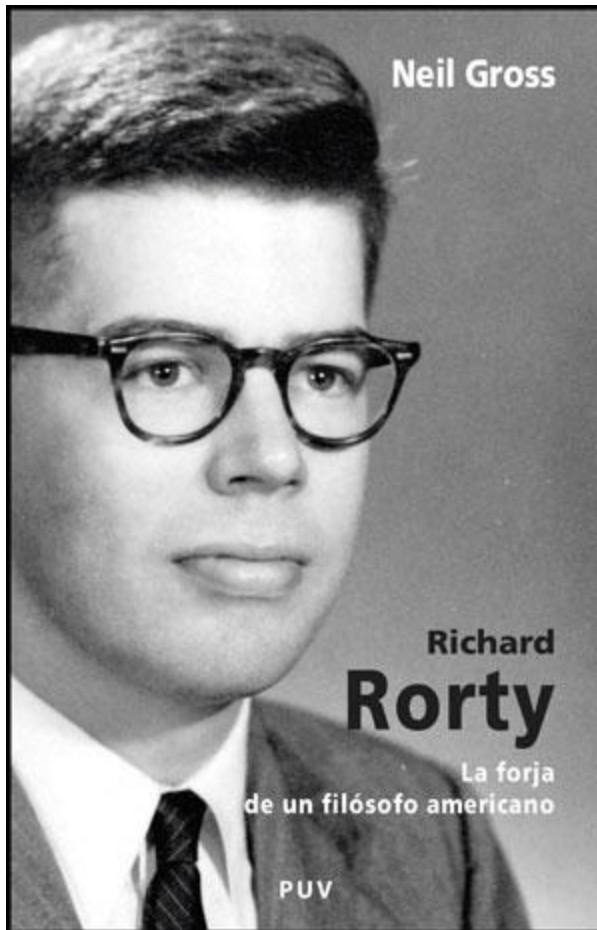
Does moral offence justify restriction? No! (see *On Liberty* chapter 2, 4).

Self-censorship

‘In our times, from the highest class of society down to the lowest, every one lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship. ... They ask themselves, what is suitable to my position? what is done by persons of my station and pecuniary [=monetary] circumstances?’

‘I do not mean that they choose what is customary, in preference to what suits their own inclinations. It does not occur to them to have any inclination, except for what is customary’ (OL 3.5).

Richard Rorty (1931-2007)



The good liberal citizen

‘even if the typical character types of liberal democracies *are* bland, calculating, petty, and unheroic, the prevalence of such people may be a reasonable price to pay for political freedom’ (in ‘The priority of democracy to philosophy’, p. 190).

Civic virtue

We should 'try to educate the citizenry in the civic virtue of having as few such compelling interests, beliefs, and desires as possible. ... Try to get them to be as flexible and wishy-washy as possible, and to value democratic consensus more than they value almost anything else' (in 'A defence of minimalist liberalism, p. 120).

Not reason

‘It would have been better if Plato had decided ... that there was nothing much to be done with people like Thrasymachus ... and that the problem was how to avoid having children who would be like Thrasymachus By insisting that he could reeducate people who had matured without acquiring appropriate moral sentiments by invoking a higher power than sentiment, the power of reason, Plato got moral philosophy off on the wrong foot.’

The right sentiments

Moral philosophers have focused on how to 'convince the rational egotist that he should not be an egotist But the rational egotist is not the problem. The problem is the gallant and honourable Serb who sees Muslims as circumcised dogs. It is the brave soldier and good comrade who loves and is loved by his mates, but who thinks of women as dangerous, malevolent whores and bitches.

Sentimental education

‘The answer to Nozick is not Aristotle or Augustine or Kant, but, for example, the writings of William Julius Wilson, and the autobiographies of kids who grew up in urban ghettos’ (DML p. 121).



Corruption of democracy

The 'vote-buying process' amounts to 'legalized corruption' (F.A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty* vol. 3) :



Politicians should concern themselves 'exclusively with the common good'. Making deals with special interests is 'outright corruption'.

A 'bargaining democracy': representatives 'bribe a sufficient number of voters to support an organized group of themselves numerous enough to outvote the rest'.

Corruption today

Brian Fried et al., 'Corruption and inequality at the crossroad', *Latin American Research Review* (2010)



Conclusions

- (1) Maintaining institutions has always been partly about controlling/shaping the passions.
- (2) Corruption – in different ways – has usually been seen as a threat.
- (3) Many of these older ways of thinking have little value for us today.
- (4) Some of them still do.