


## Tempered Experience: The Educational Foundation of Democratic Ideology

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# Tempered Experience: The Educational Foundation of Democratic Ideology

## **Abstract**

Democracy is a political ideology, one that requires a person to believe in that ideology for it to exist. The contemporary political landscape is dominated by democracies, and for this reason we need to understand how to build and sustain them. There needs to be a well-educated populace of citizens, who are able to engage in democratic actions, and aid the community. What they need is tempered experience, experience that is understood through the knowledge that a citizen already has.

## **Keywords**

Democracy, Education, Politics, Ideology, Political Ideology, Philosophy

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Nicholas Schwarm

### ABSTRACT

*Democracy is a political ideology, one that requires a person to believe in that ideology for it to exist. The contemporary political landscape is dominated by democracies, and for this reason we need to understand how to build and sustain them. There needs to be a well-educated populace of citizens, who are able to engage in democratic actions, and aid the community. What they need is tempered experience, experience that is understood through the knowledge that a citizen already has.*

### Introduction

Democracy as a term of governing has been in existence since antiquity, with the ancient Athenians carving out what we consider to be the first democracy in the governing of the city-state of Athens. After the fall of Athens, and the other Greek city-states, to the Romans, democracy as a form of government in the western world was replaced by Roman republicanism and imperialism. Limited forms of democratic assemblies, such as the British parliament, existed throughout the medieval and early modern era, in a sense keeping the thought of democratic politics alive. Democracy, as an absolute governing form, did not return to the world until the late eighteenth century, with the rise of the United States. Despite its quite recent rebirth, democratic thought has become a dominant, if not controlling, ideology in contemporary politics and governing bodies. This recent rebirth and rather rapid adoption into modern society, raises the question of how and why democracy has had such great success in contemporary political and social thought. The answer is education.

The need for education in a democracy is paramount to its continued existence as a democracy, and even greater for its founding. The education that needs to exist in a democratic society and government is

much broader, but nearly as complex or deep, than the study of subjects such as mathematics and the sciences. Yet it can be just as important, if not more so, when concerning the role of democracy in modern society. The education that is needed for democracy is that of an ideology, and the ability to apply that ideology to their place in society. An ideology is a belief or a collection of beliefs that a person holds to be true. Political and religious ideologies are the most dividing factors in the world today, and for this reason the term “ideology” has a poor reputation to it. While it is, in contemporary society, improper to teach ideology to students, it is important to remember that democracy itself is a political ideology, and to many a very correct one, and if the citizens do not understand this ideology, then what hope do they have of existing as effective democratic citizens?

### I. Democracy and Democratic Ideology

There exists a difference between a democratic government, and democratic ideology; both however are important when understanding the term ‘democracy’ in its complete sense. By linguistic definition the term ‘democracy’ is ‘a system of government by the whole of the population or all eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives’ according to the Oxford English Dictionary. While this

does not cover all of the things democracy can mean it is a good place to start. In regards to a system of government, to which the above definition alludes to, democracy is considered as rule by the many, rather than the rule by the few. What it really means is rule by the citizens. Instead of the rule by the singular, a king, dictator, emperor, or any other head of government title that has existed, the rule of the government is given to the people, at least in theory. Citizens are those people who are members of a nation, have reached a certain age of majority, and are not imprisoned by the nation for crimes against it. A citizen is a person who engages with their nation in order to better it. In a democracy that means engaging in the democratic process of voting, and educating oneself and others. From this general idea, three distinct forms of democratic government have come to exist in modern politics.

The first one, the direct democracy, while being the least common type of democratic governance, is the one that holds the most common ground with the democracy of Athens of antiquity. The direct democracy holds that every person holds a vote, a common theme in a democracy, and they vote on every aspect of governing. The citizens vote to pass every law, every policy, and every operation of the government. What we know of ancient Athenian democracy is that it followed this form of democracy more than the other two. In the contemporary political landscape, Switzerland has the closest governing form to the Athenian democracy, but it is not exact. To require any change in constitution a referendum is mandatory, and one can be requested for any change in law. However, a true direct democracy cannot exist in modern nation states; the populations are too large to have a direct democracy exist on a

national level. With so many people voting on every decision of government, there would be too much inefficiency for there to be any governing. A nation of over three hundred million would have near political stagnation.. It is for this reason that the following two forms of democracy exist.

The second is parliamentary democracy. A form of representative democracy, the United Kingdom is the most prominent example of this form of democracy, which has a head of government that is elected by the party that has the most seats in parliament. While it is less directly controlled by them, it is still the citizens who make decisions in the running of the government. The final form of democracy is a representative form of democracy, called a presidential democracy. This form of democracy elects a head of government, similar to the parliamentary democracy, the difference being that the citizens directly elect their head of government, instead of having it be based on a majority of the legislative body. The presidential democracy is known best for its use as the governing form of the United States. The important difference between these two forms of democracy and the direct democracy is their use of representation, hence their name of representative democracies or democratic republics.

A clear difference from the above examination of the term ‘democracy’, and the one that was given by the Oxford Dictionary, is the use of the term ‘citizen,’ in the place of the term ‘population,’ in regards to the people who hold the power in a democratic government. The use of the different term means very little in understanding democracy, but it means a great deal in regards to education’s importance to democracy. This citizen is more than just a member of the population;

they are, by the nature of democracy, the ruling class to which all members of a democratic nation belongs. This is the main idea behind democratic ideology.

While the governing form of democracy can take many different shapes, all of them are based around a similar idea, a political ideology, the democratic ideology, which forms the basic philosophical foundation of democratic government. Democratic ideology is a belief that the people have the right to govern themselves, rather than be dictated to by an authoritarian governmental body, such as a king. Self-rule is the staple of democratic ideology, but the desire for self-rule comes from a desire for rights, rights that were suppressed and ignored by the kings. This ideology, which disappeared for centuries after the fall of the democracy in Athens, found rebirth in Enlightenment era thinkers, a time when people began to question the authority of kings. The rebirth of a democratic ideology came from a belief that the rights of the people should not be dictated by those who ruled over them, but instead are naturally given to them by nature, or by God.

Self-rule, as a political ideology, was not, at least originally, the intent of many of these thinkers. Instead their focus was on the idea of natural rights, and the power that the government could exert on the people. For many this translated into the idea of self-rule and democracy. John Locke can easily be called the father of modern democracy; at least he is by the classical libertarians. His essay 'The Second Treatise of Government' set the grounds for the formation of The United States of America. For better or worse, this has led to the formation of democratic governments in large quantities in contemporary politics. Locke's governmental ideology, which became the basis of modern democratic ideology, held

that the rights of all people were natural to all people, and that all rights were equal to every person (Ch. 2, p. 3). As such in this state of equality no person held power over another; thus in a political sense no person could hold absolute power over another. However, Locke does not propose anarchy; he still feels government is needed, but only to protect the rights of people from infringement by others. The government would have power, but the supreme power would rest in the people, the citizens of the nation.

Locke's political ideology became the founding democratic ideology of the United States, as both the Declaration of Independence and the opening lines of the Constitution read as if taken directly from Locke's writings. Because of this the political ideology of Locke became the ideology behind most modern democracies, with the idea of self-rule becoming a prominent belief among many over the course of the past two centuries, and without the ideas of Locke and similar thinkers, this desire for self-rule could have easily devolved into anarchy, rather than a competent form of government. As it stands, democratic ideology has three major points for the formation of a democracy. First, the rights of the people are empowered to them naturally, not by the government. Therefore, secondly, no person can hold power over another without that person's express consent. Thus finally, the government is completely accountable to the people, resulting in self-rule by the citizens of the nation (Ch.1, pp.2-3).

Without the foundation of a democratic ideology, the idea and desire for self-rule turns to either anarchy or the continuation of an authoritarian government. Yet still there is one piece of the puzzle missing in regards to democratic ideology, an idea that is

alluded to in the idea of self-rule but not expressly stated. The idea is that if it is only the role of the government to ensure that the rights of the people are not infringed by others, then who governs the society, who solves the day to day problems of the community, a task that would normally be given to an authoritarian government? Under a self-rule ideology that task is given to the people, the citizens of that community. In a democracy it is the role of the people, the citizens of a nation, who have chosen to forsake an authoritarian government for self-rule, to govern the society. It is this final piece of democratic ideology where we can begin to see the need of education in democracy, and why democratic ideology is the most important thing to be taught in a democracy. For how can a community govern themselves, if they do not know that they themselves must govern?

It is the people who need to govern, and as such they need to be taught that they need to govern, and further how to govern. They need to be taught the democratic ideology which gives them the power to govern, and they must also learn the ability to govern. It is this that needs to be the basis of a democratic education. While Locke says that it is natural for people to rule themselves, it is not natural for people to know how to rule (Ch.2, pp.4-5). This is in contrast to Plato's theory of government in *The Republic*, that only a tiny number of people can rule, the Guardians or philosopher kings (VI, 473d). This difference is why education is necessary in democracy, so that the many can rule, instead of the few. It is then the purpose of education to create citizens out of the populace of a democracy. A citizen of a democracy knows and understands the purpose of self-rule in democratic ideology, and is willing and able to exist within their

role in a democracy, the role of the governed and the governor as one and the same. It is the role of education to create these citizens.

## II. The Relationship of Democracy and Education

The Athens of antiquity has been called the first democracy. Athens gave us the foundation of an education system as well. Athens was home to the sophists, a group of intellectuals who were the first paid educators in the world. While they would only teach those who were willing to pay them, they set the stage for future systems of education that followed. Athens also became home to the Academy of Plato, and many other schools of thought. These places existed as the first schools of higher learning, which the universities of contemporary society are modeled after. The facts are that Athens was considered the place of the wise and the educated, and also the place of the founding of democratic thought and government. This does not prove that a relationship exists between the two, but it definitely implies it. This relationship between democracy and education is not a new concept however as both Plato and Aristotle recognized this relationship in the democracy of ancient Athens, and while their thoughts on the matter are profound in many ways, it is not proof that the relationship does exist.

With the fall of Rome, and the Greek ideas that Rome adopted after their conquest of Greece, education and literacy fell to near non-existent levels outside the church in the western world, as did political ideology. No longer were there democracies or republics, as there existed no senate. The governments of the western world took the form of kings who ruled with absolute authority. As education began to rise again the wealth and power of the kings allowed them to be the

only ones who were educated, so they also were able to keep absolute control of their societies during this time.

As the kings needed to distribute their control, wealth, and power to others, in the form of lordships, this distributed the wealth and power of the king to others. With the wealth and power now in the hands of these lords, they were able to receive an education. These same lords then demanded power from the king in ways such as the Magna Carta of England, thus defeating the absolute authoritarian rule of the kings, and creating the rule of the aristocracy. In a sense the role to govern left the singular, and was taken by the few. Not total self-rule, but steps taken in that direction.

As society continued to advance, the lords and kings that held governing power were not the only ones who would acquire wealth. Merchants, lawyers, and many other professions were able to acquire the wealth that was previously held only by the kings and lords, and thus they were able to acquire an education for themselves and their children. John Locke was neither a king nor lord; he was a physician and a tutor. As education became available to those not in a place of political power, growth began in the birth of thoughts of self-rule and self-governance.

The founding documents of the democracy of the United States were influenced heavily by the writings of John Locke (Doernberg). The so called founding fathers of the United States were all educated men; there was not an uneducated farmer or craftsman among them. Many were lawyers, and would have studied writing by Locke and similar thinkers. Without this education in democratic ideology as a foundation for the government that they formed, it is unlikely it would have lasted. The foundation in

education is necessary for a democracy to exist; without it the idea of self-rule will turn into anarchy, as it will not be tempered by the idea of self-governance.

This can be seen in the difference between the American Revolution and the French Revolution, and the governments that were created in the absence of authoritarian rule. With the American Revolution, the United States democracy was based in the idea of self-governance, when the British government would not allow them a say in their own governance. As such, while there did exist a desire for self-rule in the American Revolution, there also existed the knowledge, and desire for, self-governance as well, allowing for the government of the United States to flourish and succeed, where the government of the French Revolution failed.

While the American Revolution had the idea of self-governance imbedded in its actions and eventual government, the French Revolution did not. The French revolutionaries wanted to rid themselves of the unjust rule of the king and the aristocracy, and they wanted self-rule; however once they had self-rule, they failed to grasp the ideas of self-governance. In the time following the success of their revolution they failed to set up a system of governance, whether by self-governance or constitutional authoritarian principles, leading to a power vacuum in France. This vacuum led to violence, paranoia, and anarchy that led to the reestablishment of the monarchy, and eventual dictatorship of Napoleon Bonaparte.

While there are numerous differences between the American Revolution and the French Revolution, the major difference that led to the success of the American rather than the French Revolution is knowledge of

self-governance as a part of democratic ideology. It is for this reason that education to be a necessity for democracy to form and exist as a form of government. Without knowledge of democratic ideology, and by extension the idea of self-governance, among the people, any attempt at self-rule will result in a power vacuum that leads to anarchy until an authority steps in to fill the vacuum. Therefore, education is needed to teach the populace to act as citizens in a self-governing society.

Citizens of a society are a different being than the populace of a nation. A citizen is a person with rights that are guaranteed and protected by the nation, but also a citizen has duties to that nation. In a democracy the duty of the citizen to the nation exists in the self-governance of society. It is a necessity in a democracy to have an education for the populace in order for them to become citizens. For without knowledge of democratic ideology, and by extension the ideas of self-governance, the populace of a democracy will be unable to act as citizens in a democracy. The importance of the self-governing citizen comes from the lack of power of the government in democratic ideology. If a democracy follows democratic ideology, meaning that the purpose of government is to protect the people from the infringement of their rights, and the citizens are to govern this society, then the government will find success. However, if they do not govern as they are required to, it creates a vacuum of power, not unlike the French Revolution, leading to anarchy. This is why it is important for a democracy to have education, so that the populace can be educated to be citizens.

The difference between the government and the citizens' governance can be illustrated thus. . Given the following situation, one person's property was stolen by another,

thus infringing upon the property rights of the first person; it is the role of the government to ensure either deterrence or punishment in this situation, as it is the role of the government to protect rights. Similarly, if a person were to kill another, thus infringing upon a person's most basic right to life, it is once again the role of the government to take charge in this situation, as it was an infringement on a person's rights. However, should a community have an issue with poverty and unemployment, neither issue involves a person infringing upon the rights of another; thus it leaves it to the citizens of the community to solve the problem of poverty and unemployment in their community. This represents the basic tenet of democratic ideology of self-rule and self-governance, that the citizens are able and inclined to solve the problems of their community.

### **III. Education for Democratic Ideology**

The necessary education for democracy to exist involves two major and connected ideas, the education in democratic ideology, and education for governance. They should not interfere or be involved in the education of the subjects that are normally taught in the modern education system, such as math, science and history. Such topics are important, and can aid in governance by the citizens when it comes to solving the problems they must overcome during self-governance, but they are a separate entity from democratic ideology. Mathematics, the sciences, history, and the numerous other subjects taught in educational institutions, are matters of fact, and as such they are absolute. Political ideology exists in more than a singular idea; there are a number of different forms of governing ideologies, different from the democratic system of governing. We, as a society, have chosen to live under a



democratic government, even if it is only because it is familiar to us. But this does not invalidate the other forms of governing. We choose to believe in democracy as an ideology, as we cannot take it as fact. This difference between fact and idea is why there needs to be a difference in the way ideology is taught.

Any ideology, including the democratic ideology, exists as an idea, a philosophy, which people choose to believe in. You can attempt to prove the ideology works, and even attempt to prove the ideology is the best possible one, but in neither case are you able to present the ideology as an absolute fact. There are two separate ways to teach an ideology, as an absolute, and as an ideology to be accepted. In both cases we reach the goal of teaching the democratic ideology; however, there is an inherent danger in trying to force an ideology as an absolute.

The first way is to teach the ideology as absolute, that the ideology, in this case being democratic ideology, is the perfect ideology, or the only one that matters, because it is the ideology that we are supposed to follow as a member of a democracy. In this situation we can easily achieve the goal of teaching the democratic ideology to the populace so they can take their roles as citizens of a society. However, in this case the ideology is not their own, in the sense that they have not adopted the idea as their own. They do not truly believe in it, and only know how to repeat what has been said to them, rather than coming to their own conclusions. Instead of having a society of citizens who believe in democratic ideology, and believe in self-governance, we instead would have a society of a populace who place no value in the success of democratic ideology, as they do not truly believe in it. By teaching democratic ideology in this fashion we cover the populace in a cloak of taught ideology so

completely that none of the person's own thought can be seen outside of the cloak. But at the end of the day, when the cloak is ripped away from the populace, they no longer avail themselves of the democratic ideology, for they never believed in it to begin with.

Instead what is needed is for the populace to wield democratic ideology as a sword. Unlike cloaking oneself in an ideology, when a society accepts an ideology as their own, by the nature of their own will, they no longer have to hide behind their ideology. They are able to understand their ideology, its strengths and flaws, and then continue to build upon their understanding. They are able to argue against dissenters and skeptics. Unlike the cloak which can only defend weakly, the sword can parry and fight back. They accept the ideology as an extension of their own thoughts and beliefs, not as something foreign to them, but something they have accepted as their own, for then it is not the words of another they heed, but instead the words of themselves. If they accept the democratic ideology set foreword by John Locke, then the words of John Locke become their own. For it is no longer the ideology of John Locke that the words are referring to, now the words are that of the ideology of themselves. In this case the ideology is not held as an absolute, nor should it be, as it would become victim of skeptical arguments that way, but held as a belief that while it can be argued against, is held as true by the citizens that put their faith in that ideology. In this way it is better to teach ideology as an idea to be accepted rather than an absolute fact.

Without the forcing of ideological beliefs, as has been shown to be detrimental to the success of democracy, how can we ensure that it is taught? We cannot. There exists no way to ensure that an exact ideology is

taught to the populace, and then completely understood by every member of society. Such a thing is impossible without indoctrination. Instead what must be done is that democratic ideology must be laid out in its entirety before the populace. Show them the rationale behind democratic ideology, allow them to read the works of John Locke, and other thinkers in democratic ideology, and show them why democracy was chosen as the preferred form of government for this nation. The logic and rhetoric can be used to persuade the populace to agree with democratic ideology, so they accept it as their own. This is the only way to create citizens who truly believe in democratic ideology, and who will act in self-governance for the success of their community.

This will not convince the entire populace however, as such a thing is impossible. Even strict indoctrination and the forcing of ideological beliefs on the populace will not convince everyone. In the novel *1984*, George Orwell describes a society indoctrinated from birth to believe in the government, and to hold their political ideology as perfection. But it does not work on everyone. There exists an underground movement that does not believe in the ideology that has been forced upon them and thus move against it. This is a fictional example but connects in a strong way with the real nation of North Korea, whose citizens have strict indoctrination and the forcing of ideology of their government as paramount. And we see it does not work as intended by the state, as there exist many who flee and defect from this government. Since neither works perfectly we must ask ourselves, do we want a populace with their true beliefs hiding behind a cloak of a forced ideology, or citizens who wield democratic ideology as an extension of their own

beliefs?

It is the nature of democracy to have self-governance by the citizens, and if they do not truly believe in democratic ideology, they cannot engage in self-governance effectively, for they do not truly believe in the idea of self-rule and self-governance.

#### **IV. Education for Self-Governance**

How is a society supposed to govern itself? It seems a challenging ideal to grasp that can seem chaotic, as the governing body of a nation is to hold absolute power over a society it governs, but as a democracy holds that the populace is the supreme power in the nation, then it seems only natural that the populace is to govern themselves. It is the nature of a citizen to engage in self-governance. However simple knowledge and acceptance of democratic ideology does not give the ability of a person to engage in the act of self-governance. We then need to be able to teach the people who have accepted the democratic ideology as their own, to act as self-governing citizens who solve the problems of their community, as it is only then that a democracy can exist as intended under self-rule and self-governance, without a power vacuum causing anarchy and chaos.

Self-governance cannot be taught strictly in a classroom, or by a teacher, nor can it be taught only by a parent, relative, role model, or community leader. The ability to engage in self-governance is one that requires both instruction and experience in order to manifest itself in a person, making them a citizen. The knowledge of how to govern can be taught, we can teach problem solving and critical thinking, we can inform the populace of the problems that exist within our society and community, and we can even inform them how these problems might be solved. But none of these things can give

someone the ability to govern, as the perils of governance cannot be taught, only experienced. In order to become a self-governing citizen, a person must have the knowledge of how to govern, and the experience to deal with governing. This is tempered experience.

Experience is a wonderful thing. It teaches us things that can never be learned by sitting in a classroom, listening to instruction, or reading a book. It allows us to test our knowledge in the world at large to find what works and what doesn't, and decide for ourselves what are the best actions to take.

Everything that comes to our eyes is book enough: a page's prank, a servant's blunder, a remark at table, are so many new materials... to rub and polish our brains by contact with those of others. (Montaigne, Bk.1, Ch. 26, p. 112)

But experience alone is nothing; it provides little aid in understanding the world, as no knowledge exists to understand the world. Experience acts like a lump of hot iron; useless on its own, it takes the hammer and skill of a smith to forge the iron into something useful. Otherwise it will sit there until it cools, becoming entirely useless. Say we have two young boys, both of whom had worked in their father's business all their lives, experiencing every facet of the business. But only one boy is taught by his father how the business is run. He is taught finance and marketing, he is taught how to file proper taxes for the business, and every other aspect is taught to him by his father. Both boys are then sent out to start their own business; both have the same experience from working in their father's store, but only one boy was taught the how and the why of running the business. Between the two boys, who is more likely to succeed? The boy who

was taught.

To the boys, experience was like rain to a man trapped in a desert. The man may be able to catch a few drops in his mouth before the rain stops, and for a time he may quench his thirst, but without something to hold the rain in, a bucket or a bowl, the man has no chance of catching and keeping the rain for himself. Similarly, the one boy is unable to keep hold and understand the experience he is receiving by working in his father's shop, as he has no knowledge to connect with what he is experiencing; thus the experience leaves him finding nothing to latch onto. He does not possess the knowledge to understand the lessons the experience is attempting to teach him. One cannot simply engage in the act of governance and then claim to have the ability to govern, for they will have no understanding of what they have done, without the knowledge of how to govern, similarly to how having just the knowledge to govern is not enough to have the ability either. The bucket is useless to the man without the rain.

To be taught the ability to govern is to be released from Plato's cave. In Plato's dialogue *The Republic*, Socrates gives us the anecdote of the cave to describe his views on the different levels of knowledge, and the acquisition of higher levels of it (Bk. VII, pp. 514a–520a). Here it shall be used to describe how both taught knowledge and experience are necessary. In the cave people are chained in the dark, where they cannot leave, move, or even turn their heads. In the cave there is a fire that casts a light in front of the chained people. They cannot see the fire as it is behind them but they can see the light it casts in front of them. People then hold up images in front of the fire, casting shadows upon the wall in front of the chained people. The people who are chained

attempt to make sense of the images before them, but they cannot fully understand what these shadows are, as all they see are the shadows, reflections of the true nature of the object that they don't have experience of. The chained people have only the knowledge that is given to them by the casted shadows. This is indoctrination.

In this analogy the people chained are being taught about governance, the people casting the shadows are the instructors teaching the populace how to govern themselves, and the shadows are the knowledge needed to govern. Like the people in the cave, who know not what the true extent of the shadows they see in front of them are, neither do the populace taught how to govern have the true ability to govern based on the instruction. Neither group has the full understanding of what they see in front of them, as it is simply shadows cast by those who are trying to get them to understand the nature of the things the shadows are shadows of.

That is until they are let out of the cave. Once the people leave the cave they are able to see the true things the people used to cast the shadows into the cave. They test the beliefs that they held within the cave. They are now able to understand to the full extent what the shadows represent, and use the knowledge that they had in the cave to understand what they now experience in front of them; they now have the full picture. Should they return to the cave to explain to those still chained in the cave what they have experienced, and what they now understand, those who remained in the cave will not be able to grasp what they are trying to say, as they have not experienced what those who left the cave have. All they can do is cast shadows on the wall, for it is all they will understand.

With experience, the teachings and knowledge of how to govern are understood. The educated citizen tests their beliefs in democratic ideology, by experiencing and engaging in democracy. Citizens are able to use the skills they are taught, critical thinking and problem solving, the knowledge of the problems and how to fix them. The knowledge they have is now understood, as they have now experienced governing and how this knowledge and the skills taught to them are used in governing while those who are only taught and have not experienced will not have the full understanding of what they have been taught, and thus not have the ability to engage in the act of self-governance. The ones who have had experience in governance can return to those who have not. But all they can accomplish is sharing the knowledge of the experience of governing with them, in the same manner that the instructors would do. This does not give those who do not have it experience, and it gives them no ability to govern. This is the need for tempered experience. Having the knowledge to understand the experience that is acquired, and act according to the situation that a person finds themselves in, is why tempered experience is needed in democracy.

The kind of experience needed to govern can only be gained by the act of governing. By experiencing the challenge of solving problems in the community and society that they live in, using the thinking skills that they have been taught in an educational institution and beyond, citizens are able to self-govern. Thus the ability to govern requires the experience of the act of governing. Self-governance requires the experience, and the knowledge to understand the experience that is gained.

The origin of thinking is some

perplexity, confusion, or doubt. Thinking is not a case of spontaneous combustion; There is something specific which evokes it. (Dewey, *How We Think*, p. 11)

Self-governance requires tempered experience. For this we need to create a way for those who need to experience the act of governing to do so, without creating the issue of having those without the ability to govern governing. To do this those who have the knowledge should go out into society as a group and solve minor problems of their community, ones that will have no large impact on society, should the solutions that are created by the governing of the unexperienced fail, but problems nonetheless. Thus they can gain the ability to engage in self-governance by gaining the necessary experience in the act.

Cease conceiving of education as mere preparation for later life, and make it the full meaning of the present life. (Dewey, "Self-Realization")

What we create is an educational circle. Once citizens are taught to think critically and solve problems, given that educational foundation, they can temper their experience and solve problems. The experience then becomes something that they can use to temper further experience, creating an endless loop of learning and problem solving. This loop ensures a consistent bettering of one's own self, along with the community, as the citizen continues to expand their own ability.

In order for a person to become a self-governing citizen they must have the knowledge and the experience of self-governing to possess the ability of self-governance, for only then can they exist as democratic citizens, who, by their very nature, aid in the existence of democracy as

a form of governing. Without one of the two the ability cannot truly exist within a person, and they cannot act as a true self-governing citizen of a democracy. Similar to how not everyone will accept the democratic ideology when it is not forced upon them, so too is it likely that not all will gain the ability for governance. In an ideal perfect democracy all would accept, and all would process the ability, but we do not live in such a society. It is for this reason we have representation.

## V. On Representation

Nations in the modern era are drastically different from those of antiquity. The contemporary nation state is far larger than anything that existed in the ancient era. At its height the population of the Roman Empire could match the size of the modern nation states. The near absolute direct democracy of Athens would find it difficult to exist in a modern setting. The type of near absolute direct democracy that existed in the Athens of antiquity cannot exist in the large modern nation states. What exists in its place are the democratic republics, the democracies that are built on representation, elected citizens chosen by the citizens to rule over them. Differing from a direct democracy, it is these representatives of the citizens that make the decisions regarding the state. They make the law, and they make the policy.

There exists an inherent danger in this type of governing in regards to democratic ideals, as there is no guarantee that these representatives will continue to govern the way that the citizens wish them to govern. Under self-governance ideas, each person is to represent themselves, their values and their desires, in the political discussion. When representation is used to support democracy on a large scale the citizen gives

their ability to self-govern to their chosen representatives. In a perfect world, these representatives would conform perfectly to the ideas and desires of the people who chose them. Two things prevent this from happening. One, a representative needs to represent the ideas and desires of a community of citizens, not a singular citizen. Two, it cannot be guaranteed or enforced that a representative will conform to the wishes of those who they govern.

A democratically elected monarch would fail in his/her duty to self-govern for the entirety of the nation. Singular rulers cannot represent the views, ideas, and desires of over three hundred million people, and then still rule effectively and efficiently. Such a thing is simply not possible. There is a reason why the contemporary democracy exists in republics; it is the only way the hundreds of millions of people of a modern nation state can all have their voices heard. Self-governance is a staple of democratic ideology, and is necessary for democracy to function. There is a difference between a republic and a democratic republic, and this difference is rooted in information and education, and in a democratic republic they are linked so strongly that at times they are one and the same.

The biggest danger for a democratic republic is the complacency of the citizens, the belief that their representatives are acting in their interest, and have no need for oversight. If this belief grows in the citizen population then they give up their ability to self-govern entirely. It is the citizens who give the ability to self-govern to the representative, and it is the duty of the citizen to then oversee these representatives to make sure that they do not abuse that power, and can then take it back when necessary. Complacency would give this power of self-governance unilaterally to these

representatives, and should this occur then no longer do we have a democratic republic, just a republic. When a society of citizens monolithically gives up their right to self-govern to another body without oversight, then they choose to be ruled, not by their own desires, but by those of others. Proper information sharing and education is the defense for citizens against this compliancy.

Education goes far deeper and broader than the classroom of any school or university, and any who believe that those are the paramount of their education are more uneducated than they can ever imagine. In regards to education for representation there exists the education for representatives, and the education for the public about representatives. Representatives, in a perfect system, should not be educated any differently from that of any other citizen, as they are meant to represent the desires and ideas of the citizens. Reality is rather different. We cannot assume that the representatives will know or understand the will of the people, nor can we assume that the representatives will care to be aware of the desires of the citizens. It is unfortunate, but necessary, to assume that after election a representative will not act in the interest and desires of those who they govern, but will act in their own desire. It is the nature of democracy for each person to act by their own ideas and needs in self-governance, and then come to agreements of how to solve problems and govern with others. When we give that ability to self-govern to others, there must exist a system to prevent abuse of power. That system is the media.

The media is quite possibly one of the most powerful education tools in a democracy. Media coverage of politics and the democratic system is as important to democracy as education in ideology and

self-governance. Media is viewed as a tool for the free flow of information more than as a system of education. However, is education not the learning and experiencing of new information, and is it not the news media, whatever form you consume it in, a form of sharing new information? The consumption of this information is powerful and dangerous depending on how it is communicated. Misused the media can deceive the citizens. Because of this danger, citizens must be able to experience the media, and weigh that against what they have experienced elsewhere, and what they have learned, tempering their experience of the media.

When the subject and the basis of a discussion consist of matters that hold good only as a general rule, but not always, the conclusions reached must be of the same order. The various points that are made must be received in the same spirit. For a well-schooled man is one who searches for that degree of precision in each kind of study which the nature of the subject at hand admits. (Aristotle p.5)

Those educated in self-governance can and should use the information that the news media can provide to both the representatives and the citizen populace. Representatives should use the media to keep in touch with problems within the communities that they represent, and the desires and needs of those who give them their ability to govern. If the system of giving up one's ability to self-govern in a democracy to a representative is to be successful, then we must have a system that educates these representatives on the will of the citizens they represent. That system is the media. However, the relationship between the media and the citizens is far

more important.

Oversight of representatives is needed so that the citizens, are able to remain educated on governing actions of their representatives, and take back their ability to govern when the representatives no longer represent the governing desires of those whom they represent. In this way news media is an educational two-way street. It needs to act as the educator for the representatives and the citizens, yet this need is not equal. If the news media fails to inform the representatives of the problems and desires of the citizens, causing the representatives to govern in ways that the citizens dislike, then they can be replaced. In reverse, if the news media fails to properly educate the citizen population, then the representative is free to govern as they please. In this situation the citizens are uneducated on the workings of their democracy, and are therefore unable to self-govern by choosing proper representatives.

Education is a constant entity within a democracy, and should never become stagnant. In a modern democratic republic, the news media is to act as an educator to keep both representatives and the citizens informed about the other. If, for whatever reason, the news media fails as an educator, then the outcome is the failure and fall of democracy in the republic. No matter the form that the education or the democracy takes, there always will be that need for education, the sharing of information, for a democracy to function.

## Conclusions

Democracy is a political ideology, and if we are to believe the growth and acceptance of this form of governing as evidence, a very correct one. The ideology is based on the ideas of self-rule and self-governance,

taking the power away from the few and giving it to the many. This is not a new concept, as such governments have existed in antiquity. However, it is just now that democratic forms of government have become commonplace in modern society. Education is the reason for it. Education is paramount towards the growth and success of democracy in modern society. Without it democratic governments cannot exist, and those that attempt to will collapse.

So long as there exists an understanding among the citizens regarding democratic ideology, to the point that they can effectively exist within a democracy as democratic citizens, these citizens, so long as they are educated to engage in self-governance, can effectively contribute to the democratic discussion, solve community problems, and govern. When a

citizen is able to temper their own experience with knowledge already learned, they can then better themselves, and their community. Only with this tempered experience can a citizen self-govern in a democracy. Since it is this ability to self-govern, with the desire to self-rule, which is the fundamental basis of democracy, we can then conclude that the relationship between democracy and education is not just a benefit to the system of democratic government, but indeed a necessity, one that cannot be ignored in a successful democracy. An educational foundation is required for a democracy to exist, and a democracy should continue to foster the educational development of its citizens, so that the democracy can prosper

The full version of this article can be found at [http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/philosophy\\_undergrad/1](http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/philosophy_undergrad/1)

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