

Deism and the Founding Fathers, LeGrand Baker

Actually, Deism is the answer to your question. There are only three fundamental forms of government. 1) that described in *The Prince* where the most powerful people assume the authorities of government. 2) That described by Rousseau, where a self defined moral elite assume the authorities of government. 3) and that based on the principles of Deism, described in theory in the Declaration of Independence, and in function in the American Constitution. Let me point out the differences.

1) The coercive power of *The Prince* is the same whether the control is exercised by tribal chiefs, medieval landowners, or military dictators. This is a very simple form of government. It rests on the theory that there are casts of people and their status can easily be defined by whether they are or are not a part of the dominant aristocracy. Those who are, control both politics and economy. They control politics because the law is what they say the law is. They control the economy because they own all the real property, and often also the serfs or slaves who work the land. In most instances (Medieval Europe; ancient Rome, Egypt, Greece; apostate times in ancient Israel, Ancient China and Japan where the emperor was a god.) religion is a major means of keeping the masses in check, because the major gods support the king and validate his actions. Criminal law is established to reinforce and legalize the power of the king.

2) Rousseau said people are intelligent animals whose primary motivation is avarice: greed, self preservation, and self aggrandizement. He said because this is so, all governments tend to be tools by which the powerful to control and take advantage of the weak. He used the dark ages in Europe as a primary example. He said, however, not all people are like that. There is a small minority – a moral elite – who are capable of understanding and therefore of dispensing equanimity in society – that is, if they have the power to do it. He said it is the responsibility of this self-defined, self-appointed elite to obtain political power by revolutionary means if necessary, and use government to impose equity upon society. Marks's Communism picks up on that idea and assumes the working class would constitute that moral elite. George Bernard Shaw saw it differently. He believed the moral elite would be the well educated property class of Britain (people who already had enough money and education they didn't have to worry about ways to get more). He organized the Fabian Society of England, which is still the think tank of the British Labor Party. (When the Labor Party got power in England they nationalized railroads, coal mines, and other theretofore private businesses.) His program was that he would establish discussion groups in universities among students who were going into teaching, writing (plays, fiction, etc.), broadcasting, and other fields that had the power to change public opinion. Shaw also started private schools in England. One young woman who attended one of his schools was Eleanor Roosevelt. She returned to America, helped establish Fabian discussion groups at universities here, married FDR, and became very involved in the United Nations.

Rousseau-inspired governmental systems vary markedly in their applications of his principles. In America they are largely espoused by the Democratic party, but countered by the Republicans, so American movement toward implementing his philosophy has been slow. If Europe it has been faster. In Russia, China, and a few other places it has been rather complete. The theory looks good, but the practice is, by its nature, necessarily severely flawed. Its premise is that people,

because of their selfish nature, are not able to make decisions that are in their own collective best interest, so participatory government cannot be good government, and a self appointed moral elite must make governmental decisions for the masses. That necessarily creates a two-cast social, political, and economic system. That it creates a two cast social and political system is obvious, but so is the economic system if one looks at it closely. There is no such thing as wealth in the abstract. Wealth consists of a sequence – of both production and distribution. One can own a mountain full of gold, and it means nothing unless he can refine the gold and get it on the market. The same is true of a field of wheat. Unless it is harvested and marketed, it is not much different from a field of weeds. In Rousseau’s egalitarian system, the same people who make political decisions also make decisions about what should be produced and how it should be marketed. If their decisions are not correct, the wheat does not get planted, or if planted, not harvested, or if harvested, not marketed, or if marketed, to the wrong people for the wrong price. Criminal law is established to ensure the continuance of the system and the power of the individuals who control the state. The opportunities for corruption are enormous, and as happened in the case of Russia, destined to implode.

3) The system based on the notions of Deism was begun as the English Common Law and Parliamentary system. It matured in the colonies, and best described in the Declaration of Independence. The best discussion of the Declaration’s philosophy is Gary Wills’ *Inventing America*. In it he carefully examines the philosophical background of Jefferson’s “all men are created equal.” He shows that Jefferson’s “equality” was fundamentally different from Rousseau’s egalitarian “equality.” In the first place Jefferson and his contemporaries did not believe equality meant sameness, as is implied in Rousseau’s egalitarian ideals – Jefferson compared human society to a bucket of fresh milk. As time passes the cream in the milk will rise to the top of the bucket, and the ordinary milk will settle to the bottom. People are like that: those with natural talents will rise to the top. He believed government ought not to be used to artificially raise untalented people, or to artificially keep afloat the untalented children of talented people. But that government should get out of the way and let people seek their own levels – according to their ability or their inclination. “In the word “created” one also finds a fundamental difference between the two philosophies. Both use the word “freedom,” but with different meanings. In Rousseau’s philosophy, the fundamental purpose of the government is to grant freedom to the people. That is, freedom is a gift of government, and the extent of the freedom is as is defined by the government which gives the gift.

In Jefferson’s God made men free, and the fundamental purpose of government is three fold: to protect the people from international aggression (military and diplomatic power), to protect them from their neighbors (police and some regulatory powers), and to leave them alone and let them be the best they can be. In a word: to prevent external restraints on their freedom and to otherwise keep out of the way.

Also, in the context of his “all men are created equal,” Jefferson was not talking about “equality before the law,” neither was he talking about “equality of opportunity” (that is a 20th century idea that suggests egalitarianism. It is a handy political phrase – and like the very best of political catch phrases it has no concrete meaning.) and as such was not a part of Jefferson’s thinking. Wills convincingly shows that what Jefferson meant is that all people have an innate and equal

sense of right and wrong – they all have the same built-in conscience – a universal standard of moral excellence – and on that idea rests the whole legal justification for the American political and economic system.

In Rousseau's thinking, there is not standard of right and wrong, therefore any government that might be elected by the masses would share their inability to distinguish the common good from the common evil – therefore the need of a dictatorship of the moral elite. However, in Jefferson's system, because there is a universal conscience, the people in a government elected by the masses would share their innate sense of personal (therefore universal) right and wrong. In Rousseau's system, participatory government must necessarily be corrupt because people are selfish; but in Jefferson's system participatory government must necessarily be in the best interest of everyone, because the people who run the government would share the common values of the overwhelming majority of the citizens. Criminal law is necessary, but it only applies to those who act contrary to those commonly held values.)

A free enterprise economic system is the necessary consequence of a free political system – or else, a free political system is the necessary consequence of a free enterprise economic system – it's a chicken or egg kind of proposition. In this system wealth is still defined by production and distribution, but people are free to invent better products and create more efficient ways of distribution, and as long as they are free to do that, they and the consumers are in a mutual win-win situation. Enter modern capitalism: The Founding Fathers left matters of personal affairs to state and local governments, but did not envision the time when businesses would actually get bigger than the states. The railroad was the first to do that, so the federal government invented a bureaucracy to cope with interstate transportation. Eventually egalitarians used similar bureaucracies to further invade state and local prerogatives, like the environmental protection agency for example. All one has to do is define a problem as bigger than any state government and one has also created the rationale for creating a federal bureaucracy to handle the problem.

But now there are businesses bigger than nations, like Standard Oil, and Microsoft, so the UN and other ultra-governmental organizations are using the same rationale to establish extra-governmental world wide bureaucracies to control them. But someone has to be in charge of the government that will coordinate those world wide bureaucracies.

Consequently, there is now developing a 4th political philosophy competing with the three I have just described. In theory, it looks like a kind of combination of all the other three, and its object is the establishment of a one-world government with a one-world economy. In the meantime, Jefferson's system is not doing badly: free and democratic governments are being established all over the world at an amazing rate – more than 100 in the last 100 years, and seems to be winning over the old Rousseau-like egalitarian systems like in Russia and China. But now there has entered a new self-defined moral elite competing with both the ideas of Jeffersonian participatory government, and the old Rousseauian egalitarianism. This is the power of the people who control the international conglomerates. Their object is to establish a world peace – not a millennial reign, but a modern version of a militarily enforced Pax Romana.

Well, that's my thumbnail take on political philosophy. I hope some of those ideas are useful to

you.

Hope to see you soon

LeGrand