

## PART V

### Three Problems for Democracy

*Here as elsewhere in this book democracy refers to rule by the people—that is, to direct democracy. No doubt the problems under discussion exist in some degree in all democracies and perhaps even in all regimes. But where government is most closely dependent upon public opinion they seem to be most serious.*

*A century and a half ago Alexis de Tocqueville warned that where irreligion and democracy coexist, philosophers and those in power ought to strive to place the objects of human desire far beyond man's immediate range. Ordinary people's preoccupation with wealth getting, he feared, would otherwise cause them to degrade themselves by putting the gratification of their smallest desires before their concern for freedom and the public good. The tendency of modernity, the first essay of this section maintains, is indeed to encourage popular culture to enjoy the present at the expense of the future. Particular note is made of one consequence of widespread present orientedness: crime. But other consequences that may in the long run be of equal or greater public concern—family instability, failure to acquire work skills, dependency, unwillingness to accept public responsibilities—are also emphasized. As the first footnote of the essay points out, philosophers long before Tocqueville agreed that a present-oriented society cannot be a free one.*

*The second essay speculates upon a closely related matter: the tension, or antagonism, between individual freedom and social order. It was written to dispute the view that the big-city riots of the late 1960s were caused by "white racism," unemployment, bad housing, and poverty. Occasional outbreaks of violence, it asserts, occur naturally, especially where there are large numbers of young males. To attribute the riots to the prejudice, indifference, or callousness of "society" misrepresents the*

*situation in a way that is likely to make matters worse by generating a diffuse hostility to institutions that need and deserve the respect of the whole public. The readiness of many reformers to derogate social institutions and to exalt the radical individualism that claims moral autonomy for all raises the question: How far can this liberty be extended without undermining the foundations of the society? The implication is that rule by the people will succeed only if the people accept and act upon some common moral principles.*

*“The Dangerous Goodness of Democracy” develops a theme that was implicit in several essays and explicit in the last paragraph of “The Zoning of Enterprise.” This piece is the conclusion of a long essay on American foreign aid doctrines. When the article was written, some twenty years ago, the opinion was widely held that foreign aid would bring about rapid economic development in what were then called the backward areas of the world and that economic development would bring democracy and peace. These were the “millennial ideas” referred to in the first sentence of the excerpt. Today they have lost much of their appeal, but the moral problem that they raised is as real as ever. When should policy turn on “goodness” as opposed to “virtue”? Goodness, the kindness and liberality that a democratic public characteristically displays, is very different from virtue (the original meaning of which was courage, power, efficacy, and skill), which is the morality appropriate to those whose responsibility it is to protect and serve a public—that is, to statesmen. Participatory, as opposed to parliamentary, democracy, is liable to display goodness where virtue is called for: thus, for example, well-intentioned efforts to improve the lot of the disadvantaged may actually worsen it, thereby creating a division within the society that impairs its confidence in its worth.*

*At the end of this section, as at the beginning, the problem under discussion is one that is built into the logic of popular government. For goodness by its very nature is incapable of seeing that there are occasions when virtue, which may sometimes be cruel and unfair, ought to supplant it.*