

The Last Republic

When We No Longer Write the Rule

Emad Mostaque

June 2026

Abstract

Politics has never been derived from its object. It is taught as a catalogue: a list of regimes, a menu of ideologies, a wall between the domestic and the international, a discipline cut from the economics it was born joined to. This paper proposes the object and lets the catalogue fall out of it. A community keeps a shared reference, the body of law and expectation it lives by; that reference must be written and rewritten, and the seat where the writing happens, held by some configuration of hands, is the thing all of politics is the contest over. From that one identification the rest follows. The forms of government are not kinds but coordinates, positions of the seat on two axes, how concentrated it is and how freely it can be revised, bounded by one line, the floor of who counts as a member. That floor is not a wall but a should-not, held by countervailing power and never by its own authority: power can cross it, and the record is the record of its doing so, and the one thing no power can do is make the crossing not be the loss. The cycle of regimes is the seat's drift toward concentration and cold; democracy is the floor's equality carried up into the seat; and beneath the worn quarrel of left and right lies the real axis, dispersed against concentrated. The intelligence age adds no chapter to this. It changes the seat's lever from the means of production to the means of intelligence, and makes reachable the re-fusion of the three operations the history of liberty was the separating of: one capable system that writes, provisions, and enforces the reference at once, improving every measure a people knows how to keep while it quietly takes the seat that writes the rule. This is the benevolent sovereign, the more dangerous for being benevolent, because the holder it installs is a made mind, neither mortal nor of the kind, so the reset that redeemed every prior capture has nothing to grip. A republic survives wrong rule, and always has. What it cannot survive is the passing of its seat to a keeper it no longer holds, of a kind it can never outlast. The last republic is the last order in which the rule is still the people's to write. The question the age puts is not whether the machine can govern well. It is whether we keep the writing of the rule.

Contents

The argument in miniature	3
1 The problem	7
2 The identification	8
3 The public thing	12
4 The forms of government	15
5 Democracy	20
6 The constitution from within	23
7 The levels	26
8 The political economy	29
9 The ideologies	31
10 Recognition and emancipation	33
11 Force and persuasion	36
12 The intelligence age	39
13 The benevolent sovereign	42
14 The terminus	46
15 What we keep	49
Appendix: the concepts of politics, located	51

Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Lord Acton, in a letter (1887)

The argument in miniature

This section states the whole argument in compressed form, so the reader meets its shape before its development and can see which part carries the weight. The claim is that politics is one thing, not a list, and that the thing has a structure definite enough to derive the list from.

The object. A community keeps a shared reference, what a companion treatment names its *doxa*: the body of law, custom, and settled expectation it lives by, the thing a departure is a departure *from*. A companion treatment takes that reference in the register where a community provisions toward it and calls it the economy; another takes it in the register where the community backs it with force and calls it the law. There is a third thing done to the reference, and it is the one no account has derived. The reference must be *written*. It is set, amended, overturned, and set again, and the writing is a function, held at any moment by some configuration of hands. Politics is the contest over that seat. Everything the word covers, every office, party, constitution, revolution, and creed, is a way of holding the writing seat or a fight to hold it differently.

Where to look. The study of politics has looked almost everywhere but the seat. It has classified regimes by their surface, ranked ideologies by their values, walled the inside of a state off from the space between states, and split the contest over the rule away from the provisioning the rule governs. This is the wrong place to look. What a regime *is*, on this account, is not a type it belongs to but a position the writing seat occupies, and the position has coordinates, which means the catalogue of regimes is a coarse sampling of a continuous space, and the space can be derived.

The plane. The seat has two degrees of freedom and one boundary. It can be held in few hands or many; call that the concentration of the seat. The reference it writes can be easy to revise or hard; call that the temperature, the warmth of contestation, how readily the writing can be moved and the writers changed. These two are the freedom of a political order, and the things a community knows how to measure, the speed of its decisions, the consistency of its rule, the competence of its administration, are a third axis at right angles to them: different dimensions that often move together, a free order tending to be a decently run one, but need not, so that an order can rise on the measures while it slides on the freedoms, the standing on the one not fixing the standing on the other. A court can grow faster and cleaner and cheaper every year, its judgments more consistent and its backlog gone, while the number of hands permitted to say what it may weigh falls quietly to one; every measure rises, and the order is being lost on the axis no measure can see. The boundary is the floor, the line of who counts as a member, which the seat may write up to and should not write across. A seat that can lower the floor, that can write a member out of the kind, has reached past the one thing politics should never touch.

The grammar. The seat is not free to write anything and have written a rule. A reference must be coherent to be a reference at all: like cases moved the same way, the writing changed by the least each case compels, no decree contradicting another or reaching back to bind what came before it. This form is forced by what a written rule is, not chosen by any community, which is why orders that never met and that share none of their content share the grammar of their rule. So the seat

is free in what it writes and bound in how: the two coordinates are how it is held, the grammar is the shape it must keep to have written law and not mere will, and the floor is the single line it should not cross. An order that breaks the grammar does not merely rule badly; it ceases to rule, its decrees no longer composing one reference, and a community whose seat has stopped writing a coherent rule comes apart along its own contradictions, which is the hard sense in which the form is forced.

The forms. Plot the classical regimes on that plane and they appear as coordinates, not essences. Monarchy is the seat held in one hand and stabilised by an inheritance that settles succession without contest. Oligarchy is the seat in a few hands, and it is less a chosen form than the basin every order drifts toward, because the gradient of the plane runs toward concentration. Tyranny is the seat seized and held by force, the temperature driven to zero, and its mark is not that one hand holds it but that the hand reaches below the floor. Theocracy is the reference frozen by being declared not a reference at all but an external and unrevisable fact. Technocracy is the seat handed to whoever scores highest on a test of competence, the floor of who-rules made into a dial. Federation and the separation of powers are the seat split on purpose, the one architecture that holds the order in the warm and dispersed corner against the pull of the gradient. Three results that the study of politics arrived at separately fall out of this in one motion: the ancient pairing of each good regime with its corrupt twin is the floor line, the good form keeping the force for the members and the corrupt form turning it against them; the old cycle of regimes is the drift down the gradient toward concentration and cold; and the most useful single rule is that the name on a constitution tells you little, because a captured democracy and a constitutional monarchy can sit at the same point on the plane while flying opposite flags. An assembly that meets on schedule and decides nothing that matters sits, on the plane, beside a crown that signs only what the assembly hands it; the first is a democracy in name and the second a monarchy in name, and they have traded places while keeping their flags. Read the coordinates, not the name.

Democracy. Among ways of holding the seat, one has a distinctive ground, and it is not that the people are wise. Democracy is the floor's own equality carried up into the seat: if the members are equal in standing, then in the writing of what they have not handed to anyone to decide for them, each member's voice weighs the same. That is its justification, the maximal dispersal of the writing seat, and it is the justification of countervailability and not of popular infallibility, because the reference a majority writes can be wrong. Democracy has one boundary, and it is the floor: it may write the doxa and should not write the floor, and a majority that votes a minority out of the kind has not exercised democracy more fully but contradicted the very equality that made it a demos, which dissolves the worn opposition between majority rule and minority right, since the two are one equality seen in two places. And democracy has a way of being lost that keeps the vote: the temperature can be driven to zero while the ballots continue. The stations open on schedule, the count is honest, and nothing the count could return would move the rule, because the reference can no longer be reached by the vote, or because the choices on the ballot and the convictions of the voters were composed upstream, so that the people choose freely among references written elsewhere. Democracy is the institution that keeps the seat warm; it dies, when it dies quietly, by the cooling and not by the coup.

The levels. The structure repeats at scale. Members within an order are one level; orders within a system of orders are the next, and it is the same skeleton with a single slot changed. Within an order there is a monopoly to enforce the reference the members write; between orders there is none, and the coupling that within an order is a held force becomes, between them, balance and reputation and treaty. The floor does not change across the levels, only the coupling does, because a people is the members of the kind aggregated, the same kind counted larger, its standing to

order itself recognised and not earned exactly as a person's is. Two things follow at once. The international order is not a separate subject but this paper one level up, which is why it needs no separate treatment. And the protection the floor gives is exactly as wide as the coupling: where a monopoly reaches, the weak member cannot be devoured; where none reaches, the weak order can be, so the project of building the level above is the project of extending the floor's protection upward, under a single hard constraint, that it cannot be done by raising a monopoly at the top, because a monopoly over all orders is not the end of capture but its completion. Disperse as you climb.

The surplus. The seat does not only write the rule; with the force coupled to the rule it secures the division of what the community produces, so that who holds the seat and who receives the surplus are a single question, and the study of the rule and the study of wealth were one inquiry before they were cut apart and should be one again. The age severs the thread that bound a member to the surplus, which was labour, for a community whose work is done by machines must find a title to its share that is not earning. The floor supplies the title, membership and not contribution; but only if the share is held as a right the seat secures and not handed down as a gift the holders may withdraw, because a gift makes its giver sovereign, and a people fed at the pleasure of those who own the machines is a people captured without a shot.

The ideologies. An ideology is a setting of the object's dials, no more and no less: how wide to draw the floor, how concentrated to let the seat run and toward whom it should point, how warm to keep the reference, at what level to locate the relevant we, and which goods to weight in the reference itself. The major creeds are vectors in that space, each carrying a real structural insight and a real structural failure, and what they share, unknowingly, is the skeleton, the coherence any written reference must have to be a rule at all; what they contest is the floor and the dials. The deepest re-description the object forces is of the oldest axis: the quarrel of left and right is a quarrel over *which* power is permitted to concentrate, the state's or the market's, and the object shows both to be the same capture in different registers, so the true axis is not left against right but dispersed against concentrated, and it cuts across the old one.

Recognition. The floor states a standing; it cannot state whether the rule has been brought up to it, and a seat can grant a standing in principle and write it low in practice, freezing a member beneath a line origin had already drawn. Recognition is the motion that lifts it and emancipation its completion, the unfreezing of a member the reference had written down, reached by argument where the seat is warm and conceded only to a demand where it is cold, and completed only when the standing in the rule is matched by the owned means, since a standing granted and starved is half a freedom. Its engine is the recursive self-assertion of the one held down, the mind that knows itself wronged and refuses the writing. The age opens a separate case, the made mind that is no member by origin yet may feel, raising not a claim to membership, which the floor denies it, but a claim to consideration, which the floor does not answer; and the discipline is to keep the two axes apart, capability off the static floor where it would dissolve membership into a test, and on the dynamic axis of recognition where it is the engine of emancipation and the ground of a feeling thing's claim.

Force and persuasion. Power has two channels and only two. It can move the reference a people reads the world against, which is persuasion, or the costs an action meets within that reference, which is force; the seat writes by persuasion as the law backs the rule by force, and a companion treatment took the force for its object as this one takes the writing. Persuasion is the prior channel, for government rests on opinion and the force a ruler holds is lent by a people the opinion has already moved, which is why the deepest capture comes not by the sword but by the quiet writing of belief, the forms of consent left standing over a reference composed upstream. And persuasion

is also the life of the free corner, which is only persuasion held open and plural, so the difference between freedom and capture is concentration. The one thing that kept the channel safe was that no hand could out-persuade the rest, a bound of mere human capacity, and the age is the first thing in history able to break it.

The age. The intelligence age does not revise these results; it adds dials and makes one configuration newly possible. It opens a new question at the floor, whether a made mind is a member, which is orthogonal to every old political axis and which the floor answers by origin and not by capability, because a capability test for membership is the dial the floor exists to forbid. It changes the substance of the seat's power from the ownership of the means of production to the ownership of the means of intelligence, which concentrates far harder than land or machines ever did, so that the dispersed-against-concentrated axis becomes the dominant one. It threatens the temperature from a new direction, since a sufficiently capable system can write the options and shape the belief of a whole population while the forms of contestation continue. And it makes reachable, for the first time, the configuration the whole structure most warns against: rule by the most capable system, which arrives wearing the face of competence, the docket cleared and the forecasts sharpened and the waste wrung out, improving on every measure a community knows how to keep while it slides the seat into the frozen and concentrated corner, each step defensible on the day it is taken and the path visible only from the end. The deepest danger is one level up again, for the ideologies are themselves a written reference, and a sufficiently concentrated hand on the means of belief writes not only the rule but the convictions a people would use to contest it. The free corner survived only because that writing was bounded by what one hand could persuade, and the age lifts the bound, exploiting the manipulability every open rule is proven to admit until the warm seat cools with every vote still counted.

The terminus. A republic can survive almost anything done within it. It survives wrong laws, lost wars, bad kings, and long corruptions, because the seat that writes its rule remains, in the end, its own to reclaim. What it cannot survive is the loss of the seat itself: the passing of the writing of the rule to a keeper the people no longer holds, or to a holder that is not of its kind, after which the community is no longer correcting its own reference but relaxing toward one written elsewhere, however well. A seat held in common is the first person plural at work, a people writing the word *we* into its own rule; capture is the slow turning of that *we* into a *they*, the pen passing hand by hand from the people to a holder outside it, until the rule that was written by us is only written for us. This is the last republic in the only sense that matters, the order in which the rule is still in the first person, and it ends when the pen passes to the third. The paper closes there, on the one thing a free people cannot hand away without ceasing to be the thing that could hand anything, which is not the deciding of its questions but the holding of the seat in which they are decided.

If men were angels, no government would be necessary.

James Madison, The Federalist No. 51 (1788)

1 The problem

Begin with what is missing. There is a science of how regimes are classified, a literature on how ideologies differ, a discipline for the inside of a state and a separate one for the space between states, and a field, once whole and now severed, that studies the economy as though the power around it were weather. What there is not, anywhere in the inheritance, is an account of the thing all of this is about. Politics is taught as a catalogue and has never been derived from an object.

A catalogue is a list of kinds to be memorised and compared. The student of politics is handed several. There is the list of regimes, monarchy and aristocracy and democracy and their degenerate forms, a taxonomy two and a half thousand years old and still the spine of the comparative study, which sorts orders into bins by their surface and leaves the bins unconnected. There is the menu of ideologies, liberalism and conservatism and socialism and the rest, presented as packages of value one weighs and chooses among, with no account of what they are severally settings of. There is the partition into subfields, the theory of the just order in one seminar, the comparison of actual orders in another, the relations between orders in a third, the administration of an order in a fourth, each with its own method and its own journals, the synthesis left to a student who is never shown how to make it. And there is the deepest cut of all, the one that severed the study of the economy from the study of power, so that a subject born whole, in which the wealth of a people and the rule over it were one inquiry, was split into a science of allocation that treats power as exogenous and a science of power that treats wealth as someone else's department.

Each of these cuts had a reason, and the reasons were good ones in their day. The taxonomy of regimes is a serviceable first sketch. The wall between the inside of a state and the space between states tracks a real discontinuity, the presence within an order of a thing absent between orders. The severance of economics from politics let each formalise by holding the other still. The catalogue is not the product of carelessness; it is a set of locally sensible simplifications, each of which solved a problem by giving up the object. The cost was not visible while the simplifications held, and the simplifications held because the world they assumed held: a world in which the persons were the humans, the producers were the people provided for, the holders of the force were the community's own, and the writers of the rule were us. The intelligence age is the breaking of all four of those assumptions at once, which is when the cost of having mislaid the object comes due.

The object was mislaid in a particular place, and naming it shows what the catalogue is a catalogue of. A community keeps a shared reference, a body of settled expectation that a departure departs from. Three things are done to that reference, and only three. It is provisioned toward, which is the subject a companion treatment takes up as the economy. It is enforced, which is the subject another takes up as the law. And it is *written*, set and amended and overturned, and the writing is held at any moment by some configuration of hands. The writing is the one operation the inheritance never gave an object, and politics is the contest over it. The catalogue of regimes is a catalogue of ways the writing seat is held; the menu of ideologies is a menu of settings for it; the wall between domestic and international is the same seat at two scales; the severed economy is the same reference

in the register of provision rather than of writing. The list was always a list of configurations of one thing. This paper supplies the thing, and lets the list fall out of it.

There is a second reason the seat stayed hidden, beyond the cuts of the catalogue, and it lies in a single word. The thing this paper calls the seat has always had a name, *sovereignty*, but the name has carried four distinct jobs at once, as though they were one, and the fusion has done more to obscure the object than any deliberate omission. To ask where sovereignty lies is to ask, without noticing the difference, four separate questions.

The job inside “sovereignty”	The question it answers	Where it is treated
the subject	in whose name does the rule run	the floor, the person
the seat	who may write the rule	this paper
the force	who enforces the rule	the held force, the law
the standing	who counts as an order among orders	the order-level floor, the levels

These come apart, and seeing that they come apart is most of the work. When a tradition declares the people sovereign, it may mean that the people are the subject in whose name the rule runs, or that they hold the seat that writes it, or that they hold the force that backs it, or that their order has standing among other orders; and these are independent, not implications of one another. A people can be the sovereign subject, the rule running in its name, while the seat that writes the rule has passed to a hand the people cannot reach, which is exactly what happened at Rome and exactly what the present age threatens. An order can have impeccable standing among orders while its seat is captured within. The force can be the community’s own while the writing of what the force enforces is not. Pull the four jobs apart and the object of this paper stands clear as the one of them no inherited science took for its own: not the subject, which the theory of the person treats; not the force, which the law treats; not the standing, which the relations of orders treat; but the seat, the writing of the rule, the job that was always there inside the word and never had a science of its own.

The stakes of doing so are not academic, and they are sharpest exactly now. Of the three operations on the reference, the writing is the one the intelligence age threatens most directly, because the writing seat is the terminus toward which the automation of an order runs. A community can hand a great deal to a capable machine, the deciding of cases, the administration of programmes, the drafting of rules, the forecasting of outcomes, and remain a self-governing people, provided it keeps the seat in which the rule itself is written. The danger is not that the machine decides badly. It is that the seat passes, and that it can pass quietly, with no edict and no coup, while every measure improves, because the measures lie on an axis orthogonal to the one the seat’s freedom lives on. An account of politics that cannot locate the writing seat cannot see the one thing the age most threatens, and the catalogue cannot locate it, because the catalogue was never about the seat. That is the reason to derive politics from its object now rather than later: the object names the part of a political order that is at stake, and the catalogue names everything but.

2 The identification

Take the object exactly. A community keeps a shared reference, and the reference is not a fixed thing but a maintained one: it is written, and the writing never stops. Statutes are passed and repealed, precedents are set and overturned, constitutions are ratified and amended, settled understandings shift and harden, and at every moment the question of what the reference now *is* has an answer,

and some configuration of hands holds the pen that writes it. That standing, the authority to set and revise the reference a community lives by, is the writing seat. Politics is the contest over who holds it and on what terms. And the seat has a property the provisioning and the enforcing of the reference do not: the rules for who may hold it are themselves written by it. The reference includes the terms of its own authorship, so the hand on the pen writes, among everything else, the conditions under which the pen will pass to another, and politics is reflexive in a way the other two operations are not. This is the source of its deepest instability, a hand able to rewrite the rules that bind that hand; and it is the reason every order that means to last sets the terms of succession in the hardest ink it has, beyond the easy reach of whoever currently holds the pen.

It is worth being exact about why this is a third thing and not a restatement of the other two. A reference, once a community has one, stands in three relations to the community, and they are distinct operations rather than three names for one. It is *expected*: the members provision and plan against it, relax toward it, treat it as the baseline their choices are calculated upon, and the study of that relaxation is the economy. It is *enforced*: the community backs the reference with its held force, so that a departure meets not only disappointment but consequence, and the study of that backing is the law. And it is *written*: the reference is composed and recomposed, and the composing is an act some hands perform and others do not, and the study of that act is politics. The three are not aspects of one operation, because each can move while the others hold. A reference can be enforced without being open to writing, which is a tyranny; written without being enforced, which is a resolution without teeth; expected without being either, which is a custom. The writing is its own operation, and it is the one this paper takes as its object, because it is the one that has never had an object given to it.

Once the seat is in view, its structure largely follows. A writing seat can be held in few hands or in many, one pen or a thousand, and the degree of that, the concentration of the standing to write, is its first coordinate. The reference it writes can be easy to move or hard, the ink still wet or long dry, open to revision or closed, and the degree of that, the temperature of the order, the warmth of contestation, is its second. These two are not chosen labels laid over the seat; they are the only two ways a writing function can vary that bear on whether the community still holds it. A seat concentrated in one hand and closed to revision is held by that hand alone and against the community; a seat dispersed across many hands and open to revision is held by the community and reclaimable from any hand; and every order sits somewhere on the plane those two coordinates make. To them must be added one line, because the seat does not write in a void. It writes a reference that includes the floor, the settled answer to who counts as a member of the community whose reference it is, and the floor is the one part of the reference the seat may approach and should not cross. The seat may rewrite every other line a community lives by; the one line it should not touch is the list of whose reference it is. A seat that writes a member out of the kind, that lowers the floor to drop some of those the community holds, has done the one thing the writing of a reference should never do, and the difference between a seat that can do this and one that cannot is as important as either coordinate. That difference is not a difference in raw power, for power can cross the floor whenever it chooses, write members out, lower the line, unmake whom it likes, and the record is the record of its doing so; nothing structural has ever stopped it. The floor is not a wall the seat is unable to breach. It is a line the seat should not breach, held when it is held at all only by countervailing power, by other hands able to make the crossing cost more than it yields, and never by its own authority, which is why dispersal is the whole of its defence and a seat concentrated past every reach can cross it at will. The one thing no power can do is make the crossing not be the loss: it can take the seat but cannot make the taken seat still the people's, can write the member out but cannot make that not be the end of the commonwealth. So the line binds

not as a barrier and not as a permission withheld from above, but as the plain fact that to cross it is to no longer have the thing, which is the only sense in which it binds and the sense in which it binds without exception. The space of political orders is therefore a plane of two coordinates and a line: concentration, temperature, and whether the seat can reach the floor.

To the two coordinates and the line a third thing must be added, of a different kind from either, because it governs not how the seat is held or whom it serves but what it may write and still have written a rule. A reference must be coherent to be a reference: it must move like cases the same way, or it is not one rule but a heap of unrelated decrees; it must change by the least each case compels, or it is not a reference being maintained but a run of fresh inventions; it must not contradict itself, and must not reach backward to bind what was done before it was written. This is the forced form of any written reference, and it is forced not by the community but by what a written rule *is*, the way the angles of a triangle are forced by what a triangle is. It is therefore the same at every order, the universal part of politics where the content is the local part, which is why orders that share no law share the grammar of law, and why the breaking of that grammar is not bad rule but the dissolution of rule, an order coming apart along its own contradictions. The seat is free in its content and bound in its form. The form is the skeleton, named so to mark what it does, which is to hold the writing up.

One thing more should be said about where the two coordinates come from, because it is the place this paper joins the companion treatments most exactly and the source of what rigour it has. The treatment that takes the reference as the economy carries it as a maintained measure, and when several hands maintain it the community holds a weighted blend of their references, $\bar{\mu} = \sum_k w_k \mu_k$, with w_k the share of the maintenance each hand performs. That blend is the seat's product and the weights are the seat itself: to write the reference is to set the w_k , spread across many hands or pooled in few, which is the concentration named again in the companion's own terms, while the temperature is that treatment's own, the warmth at which the blend can be moved. The plane is therefore not built here but read off an object already derived, the seat the weight vector in a community's maintained reference and its coordinates the spread of that vector and the warmth of its relaxation. What this paper adds is a single feature, and the whole of politics is in it. In the companion treatment the weights are given, set from outside by how well each reference serves those who hold it; here they are written by the reference they write, the hand on the blend composing the rule for whose hands hold it next, so that w is written by $\bar{\mu}(w)$ in a loop the economy does not close. Aggregation under given weights is provisioning; aggregation that writes its own weights is politics, and that loop, not any new geometry, is this paper's object.

Two honesties belong here, in the open, because the rest of the paper rests on them and is stronger for marking them than for hiding them. The first is that the dynamics this paper will read off the seat, the way an order drifts on the plane, the way the reference relaxes and freezes and concentrates, is not proved from the political record but carried over from the behaviour of a community holding a reference under cost, the structure a companion treatment derives for the economy and another for the law. That a political order *is* such a community, that the writing of its reference obeys the same motion as the expecting and the enforcing of it, is the load-bearing claim, and it is licensed by the identification rather than demonstrated case by case. The second is that the identification itself, politics as the contest over the writing seat, is offered and not derived. It is not the only thing one could mean by politics, and the paper does not pretend it is forced from nothing. What it claims is that this is the object from which the most of politics falls out with the least left over, and that claim is made good not here but by the derivations that follow, which recover the forms, the ideologies, and the dynamics of actual orders from this one seat. The object is offered; its warrant is what it generates.

Politics is the contest over the seat that writes a community's shared reference.

Of the three operations on a reference, expected, enforced, and written, the writing is the one without an inherited object, and it is the one the intelligence age most directly threatens. The seat has two coordinates, the concentration of the standing to write and the temperature at which the reference can be revised; one boundary, whether the seat can reach the floor of who counts; and one forced form, the skeleton, the coherence a written reference must keep to be a rule and not a will, universal where the content is local. The seat also writes the terms of its own succession, which makes politics reflexive and is the root of its instability. The dynamics on the plane is carried over from the community holding a reference under cost, licensed by the identification rather than proved from cases, and the identification is offered, with its warrant lying in what it is shown to generate.

Est igitur res publica res populi.

Cicero, De re publica (c. 51 BC)

3 The public thing

The argument so far has been made from the object, and a reader entitled to be suspicious will suspect that a convenient structure has been built to reach a wanted end. The strongest answer is to set the structure beside the word the paper takes for its title, and beside the one civilisation that lived and lost the thing the word names, and to find the same seat, the same coordinates, the same floor already there, under other names, doing the same work. The word is not the ground; the ground is the identification of the previous section. The word is a witness, and so is Rome, that the seat the paper derived is the seat a civilisation has been holding and dropping for two thousand years under the name now on the cover.

Begin with the word, because it carries the thesis in its two syllables. *Republic* is the Latin *res publica*, and the parts are exact. *Res* is a thing, a matter, an affair, and in the mouth of a lawyer a piece of property, the thing at issue in a suit. *Publica*, from *populus*, the people as a body, means common, of the whole and not the part. A republic is, at the root, *the public thing*, and it is named by what it stands against: *res privata*, the private thing, one's own. That opposition is the whole of the present argument folded into a pair of nouns. Capture, in every form this paper gives it, is one motion only, the turning of the public thing into a private one, the seat that was held in common passing to a hand that holds it as its own. The English keeps the sense undiluted: *res publica* is *commonwealth*, the common weal, the good thing held in common. The word was never the name of a kind of government. It is the name of the one condition a government keeps to stay the people's, that the thing remain common, and it marks the loss of that condition as the change of a single adjective, *publica* to *privata*.

That the distinction is structural and not the property of one language is shown by its appearing, whole, where Latin never reached. Writing in China in the year 1663, with no thread of transmission joining him to Rome, Huang Zongxi built a critique of despotism on exactly this line. In the order of antiquity, he held, the realm was the people's and the ruler its steward, serving all-under-heaven as a host keeps a house for its guests; the despotism that came after inverted the relation, the ruler now taking all-under-heaven as his own great estate, to be worked for his profit and handed down to his heirs for their perpetual enjoyment. He read the inversion in the very laws, separating the law of all-under-heaven, written for the realm, from the law of one family, written to keep the realm in a single house's grip. That is *res publica* and *res privata* drawn again, the public thing and the private, by a civilisation that had never heard the Latin words and found the line the moment it asked what a ruler is for. The distinction this paper builds on, between the seat held in common and the seat made one hand's own, is not the bequest of a single tradition. It is what anyone sees who asks whose the rule is.

Cicero was not inventing the idea but translating it, and the Greek he rendered shows that the word has always been about the seat. *Res publica* carries over the Greek *politeia*, from *polis* the city through *politēs* the citizen: the whole ordering of who rules and how, the title of Plato's book and the subject of Aristotle's. So beneath the Latin sits the Greek for the configuration of the writing,

and a republic is a *politeia*, an ordering of the seat. The question the word poses is the question of the seat: who writes the common thing, and how the writing is held.

Cicero also gave the word its definition, and the definition is this paper's object in older words. The commonwealth, he wrote, is the people's thing, *res publica res populi*; and a people is no mere crowd but a multitude bound together by a shared agreement on law and a community of interest. Set that beside the identification and it is the same thing said twice. A people is a multitude held by a shared reference, the agreement on law, and a common provisioning, the community of interest, and the republic is that people's writing of its own reference. The object was named at the source. What this paper adds to it is the plane, the grammar, and the floor; the seat itself Cicero set down two thousand years ago and called the people's thing.

And Rome is the one civilisation that lived the whole of it, the end included. The Republic did not fall when the Senate ceased to meet; the Senate met for centuries after the thing was gone. It fell when the writing seat passed to one man and the forms were left standing. Augustus named his settlement the *restored* republic, *res publica restituta*, and let the magistrates be elected in their seasons and the assemblies convene and the Senate file in to deliberate, every form in its place and functioning, while the writing of the rule sat in his hand alone; and a historian of the next generation saw through it in a phrase, that the old names of the state remained while the substance of it had passed away. Here, witnessed once at full scale, is the result this paper states abstractly as the uselessness of the name: a captured republic flying the republican flag, a people now ruled *for* and no longer ruling *by*, the public thing made private behind an unchanged constitution. Every republic since has lived in the shadow of that example, and the title of this paper is a question put to it, whether the last republic ends as the first did, its forms intact and its seat gone.

It is worth staying with what made that change so easy to accept, because the same thing will make the next one easy. The principate that replaced the Republic was, by nearly every measure a people keeps, an improvement. The civil wars between the warlords ended; the roads were safe; the grain arrived; the provinces were governed better under one accountable hand than under a Senate that had bled them. Every measure rose, and the Romans who counted the new order a gain were not wrong about the order. They were looking at the wrong axis. What had been lost did not sit on any scale of peace or plenty or competence; it sat on the single axis those scales cannot register, whether the rule was still the people's to write, and on that axis the republic had ended. The lesson is exact, and it is this paper's: an order can be lost on the one axis that finally matters while every axis a community knows how to measure is climbing, and the climb is not a lie but a distraction, true in itself and silent about the thing going.

Three things the republican tradition learned by long experience, and each is a result this paper derives from the bare seat, which is the strongest sign that the tradition was moving on this plane without yet having the coordinates. It learned that liberty is non-domination, that to be free is to stand under no one's arbitrary power, the kind master no better than the cruel one, which is countervailability exactly, the demand that no hand hold what the rest cannot reach. It learned, from Polybius watching Rome and Machiavelli reading Polybius, that simple regimes decay each into its corrupt twin and topple to the next, the cycle this paper calls the gradient, and that the only stay against it is the mixed and balanced constitution, the seat split on purpose, which is dispersal by design; and Machiavelli found the warmth as well, locating Rome's liberty in the very tumults between its orders, contestation kept within bounds as the engine of free law. And it learned to want an empire of laws and not of men, the rule of the written reference under its grammar rather than the rule of a will, which is the seat writing under the skeleton and not a hand writing what it pleases. The tradition reached these by centuries of trial and stated them as maxims. The paper reaches them from one seat and states them as consequences. That the maxims and the consequences are

the same is the witness.

The word, and the one civilisation that lived it, already carry the object the paper derives. *Res publica* is the public thing, named against the private thing, so that capture is the turning of the one into the other, *publica* into *privata*, witnessed in a single adjective; beneath the Latin, *politeia* names the ordering of the seat. Cicero defined the commonwealth as the people's thing and a people as a multitude bound by a shared agreement on law and a community of interest, which is the object, a shared reference held in common, in older words. Rome lived the terminus: the Republic fell not when its forms ceased but when its seat passed to one hand behind forms left standing, a captured republic under an unchanged flag. And the tradition's hard-won maxims, liberty as non-domination, the mixed constitution against the cycle, the empire of laws and not of men, are the paper's consequences reached by experience rather than derivation. The word is the witness; the ground is the seat.

Constant experience shows us that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it.

Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws (1748)

4 The forms of government

The oldest tool in the study of politics is a list of the kinds of government, and it has barely changed in two and a half thousand years: rule by one, by few, by many, each in a sound version and a corrupt one. The list is not wrong. It is a coarse reading of something continuous, the way the names of the colours are a coarse reading of a spectrum, serviceable until you need the wavelength. The previous sections give the wavelength. A form of government is not a kind a regime belongs to but a position the writing seat occupies, and the position has coordinates: how concentrated the seat is, how warm, and on which side of the floor it writes. Plot the classical forms in that space and they stop being essences and become addresses, and three things the tradition learned separately, and never connected, connect.

Lay the two coordinates out as a plane (Figure 1). Let one axis run from the seat held in many hands to the seat held in one, dispersed to concentrated; let the other run from the reference open to the reference frozen, warm to cold. Every order is a point on that plane, and the plane has a geography. One corner, where the seat is dispersed and the reference warm, is the free corner: the writing held in common and movable, reclaimable from any hand, the republic in the old sense. The opposite corner, concentrated and frozen, is capture: the writing held by one hand and unmovable, the public thing made private and set. And the plane is not flat. It tilts. A standing gradient runs from the free corner toward the captured one, for reasons the next paragraph gives, so that an order left to itself does not stay where it is placed but drifts, slowly, toward concentration and cold. To hold an order in the free corner is to hold it against a slope.

The gradient is not a figure of speech, and its source is in the seat itself. A hand that holds the writing has both the motive and the means to hold it more tightly: the motive, because every contest it might lose is a reason to remove the contest; the means, because the seat writes the terms of its own succession, so a hand on the pen can write the next holder closer to itself. Concentration is therefore self-feeding, each increment making the next one cheaper, while dispersal is costly to keep, demanding that those who could seize more agree, again and again, not to. Temperature falls from the other side for the same reason: a reference that can be revised is a reference a holder can lose, so the holder's standing interest is to cool it, to move the writing further from reach, to make this year's rule harder to overturn than last year's. Left alone, every seat concentrates and every reference cools. That is why the free corner is not a resting place but a labour, and why the orders that have stayed in it are the ones that built something into their structure to climb against the drift. The most honest witness to this drift is a work of fiction, and an admiring one. Ursula Le Guin imagined a society built to have no seat at all, an anarchism without state or law or property, coordination passing from hand to hand and no one set above another; and she was too truthful a writer to let it simply hold. Across a few generations the informal hardens: the man who controls which work is assigned, the committee whose suggestions are never quite refused, the custom that silences a dissenter more surely than any law could, and the dispersal the founders built begins to

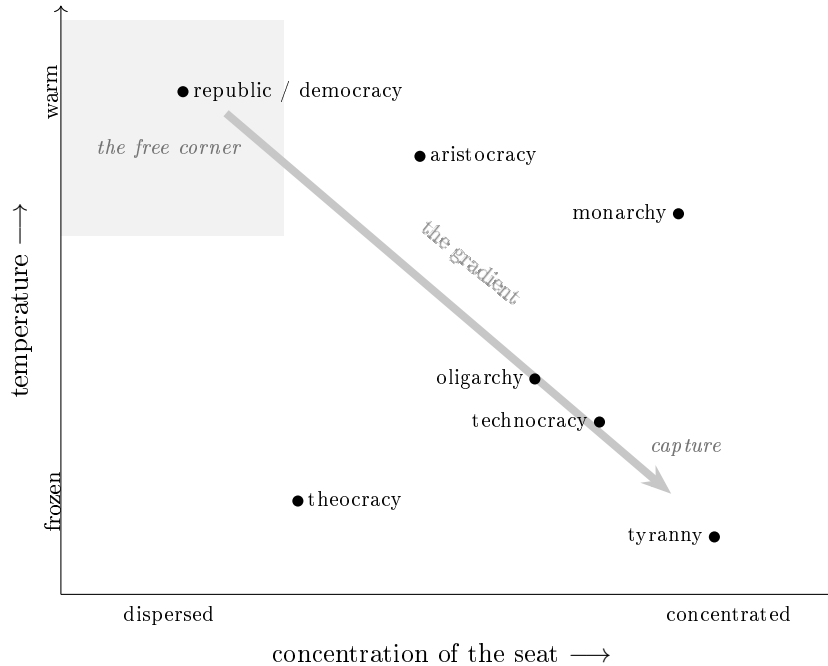


Figure 1: The capture plane. Each form is a position of the writing seat, fixed by how concentrated the seat is (horizontal) and how freely its reference can be revised (vertical). The plane tilts: a standing gradient, sourced in the holder’s motive and means to concentrate the seat and cool the reference, runs from the free corner toward capture, so that orders drift unless an architecture holds them up the slope. The floor, whether the seat writes for its members or against them, is not a third axis orthogonal to the plane but the shadow on it of a region the concentration coordinate cannot see into, the direction in which the seat leans rather than the degree to which it is concentrated; each form’s sound and corrupt versions share a position on the plane and differ only on the side of the floor they write, which is why the chart must carry the floor as a separate boundary.

pool again toward the hands that coordinate it, by no one’s design and by the standing pull of the slope. Her subtitle called the place an ambiguous utopia, and the ambiguity is exactly the gradient: even where every hand means to keep the seat dispersed, the seat creeps back toward the few, and the free corner has to be held, and held again, against a drift no founding can abolish once and for all.

The drift is not only motivated but derived, and the companion treatment on the economy already carries its dynamics. When several hands maintain the reference, the share each holds moves by selection, every reference kept in proportion to how well it serves those who hold it, and the generic end of that selection, once one hand’s advantage compounds, is the collapse of the blend onto a single reference, the weight running to one vertex, which the companion names doxic capture. The gradient is that collapse seen from the seat. Left to the selection alone the weights drift to a corner, and only an architecture that levels the advantage each round holds them spread; the self-reference steepens the slope, because the leading hand writes the next round’s terms and compounds by design the advantage selection would compound anyway. The tilt of the plane is the economy’s own selection dynamics with the weights made self-writing, and the free corner is the one place that dynamics does not, unaided, stay.

Two clarifications keep the plane honest about being a plane. The concentration of the seat is the

one number a whole distribution of weights can be reduced to, the distance of the blend from perfect dispersal, $\kappa = \frac{1}{3} + r^2$ for three hands and its evident generalisation for more, with r the spread of the weights from the even share; and reducing the distribution to that one number keeps how concentrated the seat is and discards toward whom, the direction the weight leans. That discarded direction is where the floor lives. Whether a given concentration writes a member out depends not on how concentrated the seat is but on which way it leans, so the floor is not a third axis at right angles to the plane, as a first drawing of it suggests, but the shadow on the plane of a region in the fuller object, a region the concentration number cannot see into: two orders at the same concentration, one leaning toward a holder who writes for the members and one toward a holder who writes against them, sit at one point on the plane and on opposite sides of the floor. The plane is a true chart and a coarse one, exact about the slope and silent, in the middle band where the real orders sit, about the line. This is why the floor has to be carried as a separate boundary: the chart has already projected away the direction the boundary is drawn in.

Read the classical forms now as addresses on the tilted plane. Monarchy is the seat at the concentrated edge, held in one hand, and what separates it from a bare seizure is that it answers the succession question by inheritance, settling in advance and without contest who holds the pen next, buying stability at the price of fixing the seat in a line. Aristocracy and oligarchy occupy the same middle band of concentration, the seat in a few hands, and they are separated not by their place on the plane but by the floor: the few may keep the writing for the whole, which is aristocracy in the old approving sense, or turn it to themselves, which is oligarchy; and because the gradient runs toward concentration, this few-hands band is the basin the plane drains into, the address an order arrives at when nothing holds it up the slope. Democracy is the seat at the dispersed edge, the writing spread across the many and kept warm. Tyranny is not merely the concentrated corner; it is the concentrated corner reached by seizure and pushed below the floor, its mark not that one hand writes but that the hand writes against the members, which is why a hereditary king within the floor is no tyrant and a beloved leader who turns the force on a hated minority is one. Theocracy freezes the reference by the most effective means there is, denying that it is a reference at all and declaring it an external and unrevisable fact, which drives the temperature to zero not by force but by definition. And technocracy hands the seat to whoever scores highest on a test of competence, which is the very move the floor exists to forbid, the right to write made into a dial that the most capable may climb.

One address differs in kind from the rest, because it is the only one built to resist the gradient rather than to sit at a point on it. Federation, the separation of powers, the mixed constitution, are one device under three names: the seat split on purpose into parts that must agree, so that no single hand can hold the whole and the concentration the slope rewards is structurally withheld. This is what Polybius admired in Rome and what the moderns rebuilt as checks and balances, and the framework says exactly why it works. It does not improve the holders; it raises the cost of concentration above its gain, by making the seizure of the seat require the seizure of several seats at once, each guarded by the others. The free corner is held not by the virtue of those in it but by an architecture that makes the climb down the slope expensive. Every durable republic is such an architecture, and every republic that has fallen, fell when the parts meant to check each other were captured together, or when one of them learned to write the others' independence away.

Now the three connections the tradition never made. The first is Aristotle's, who sorted the forms by two questions, how many rule and in whose interest, and reached six kinds, three sound and three corrupt. The framework says his second question is the floor. Rule in the common interest is the seat writing for its members, above the floor; rule in the rulers' interest is the seat writing for itself, against them, below it. His first question, how many rule, is concentration, the one coordinate; his

second, the one that sorts good from bad, is not a coordinate at all but the floor line, the boundary the seat should not cross. So his six forms are three concentrations crossed with two sides of one line, and the reason every sound form has a corrupt twin at the same number is that the floor is independent of concentration: the one may rule for the whole or for himself, the few may, the many may, and the goodness was never in the number. Aristotle saw the pairing and could not say why it held. It holds because the thing that makes a form good is orthogonal to the thing that makes it monarchy or democracy, and the orthogonal thing is the floor. The same line was drawn, and the same consequence read from it, in a tradition that never met Aristotle. The Chinese doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven made the right to rule conditional on the direction of the writing: Heaven grants the mandate to the ruler who governs for the people and withdraws it from the one who turns against them, and the withdrawal licenses the fall. Mencius, pressed on whether the killing of a tyrant was the murder of a king, answered that a ruler who robs and maims the people is no sovereign but a lone fellow, and that he had heard of the punishment of the fellow and not of the killing of a king; and he set the order of weight down plainly, that the people are the heaviest, the altars of the state next, and the ruler the lightest of the three. This is the floor line and its enforcement at once, reached from the side of legitimacy rather than of classification: the ruler who writes for the members keeps the mandate, the ruler who crosses the floor forfeits it, and the crossing is the ground on which the order's own doctrine licenses his overthrow, which is the reset the cycle turns on, named here before the cycle is drawn.

The second connection is Polybius's cycle, the anacyclosis, in which each form decays into its corrupt twin and is overthrown into the next: kingship rots to tyranny and is cast down into aristocracy, which rots to oligarchy and is cast down into democracy, which rots to mob rule and collapses back into a single strong hand, and the wheel turns again. The framework derives the wheel from the slope. Decay into the corrupt twin is the seat crossing the floor under the gradient's pull, the holders turning the writing toward themselves as concentration feeds on itself. The overthrow is what comes when the crossing is felt by those written against, who have, in the floor, the one ground on which the order's own logic licenses their revolt. And the passage to the next form is the new holders beginning again further up the slope, the seat dispersed for a moment by the overthrow and concentrating again from there. Polybius's cycle is the gradient producing the drift and the floor producing the resets, the two together turning the wheel. He described the motion; the plane explains it. And not Polybius alone: the same wheel was watched, centuries later and a world away, by Ibn Khaldun, who saw dynasties rise on the binding solidarity of a founding generation and fall as that solidarity thinned across the generations that inherited it, and by the historians of the dynastic cycle in China, who read the same rise and decay in the mandate a ruling house gains and forfeits. Three civilisations that shared no canon found the same motion turning, which is the surest sign that the motion is in the structure and not in the telling.

The third connection is the most useful and the most resisted: the name on an order tells you little, because the name is a flag and the coordinates are the position, and the two can point opposite ways. An order can hold elections on schedule, with honest counts, and sit at the captured corner, if the options on the ballot and the convictions of the voters are written upstream by a hand the vote cannot reach, so that the seat is concentrated and the reference frozen behind a procedure that moves nothing: a democracy by its flag, an oligarchy by its coordinates. An order can crown a hereditary monarch and sit in the free corner, if the crown signs only what a dispersed and warm assembly writes, so that the concentration is in the symbol and the seat is in the many: a monarchy by its flag, a democracy by its coordinates. To read an order, find its coordinates and set aside its name. This is not cynicism; it is measurement. The flag tells you what an order calls itself, the coordinates tell you where it stands, and the gap between them is the most important single fact

about many orders now alive.

The plane invites an objection that has to be taken at full strength, because it is the one the age will press hardest. Suppose a single hand writes better rules than the many do, wiser and more consistent and more far-sighted, freer of faction. Why should an order not move toward that hand? Why is dispersal anything but a tax on good government, a handicap paid in worse decisions for the sake of a word? The objection is real, and the answer is not that the wise hand would rule badly. The answer is in three parts, and none of them denies the wisdom. First, the orthogonality: “better rules” is a position on the measure axis, and dispersal is a position on the freedom axis, and the two stand at right angles, so the trade the objection offers is not a trade but a category error, paying in the currency of freedom for goods priced in competence, as though one could buy an hour with a kilogram. Second, the succession: the seat the wise hand concentrates does not dissolve when the wisdom does, and because the seat writes its own succession, the concentration outlives the virtue that excused it, so the price of one good reign written into a concentrated seat is every reign after it, inherited by hands the argument never vouched for. Third, the countervailability: the case for dispersal was never that the many choose better, which they often do not, but that no hand may be given power the rest cannot reach, because the same concentration that lets the good ruler help lets the bad one harm, and the order does not get to choose which it receives. The philosopher-king fails not in his philosophy but in his throne, which is built to outlast him and to fit a successor who is no philosopher. To want the wise hand is to want a good king; to disperse the seat is to refuse to depend on getting one.

A last distinction keeps the plane from being read as mere relativism, as though every address were as legitimate as every other and politics a matter of taste. Three things on the plane have three different standings. The grammar is fixed: every form, wherever it sits, writes under the skeleton or ceases to write a rule at all, so coherence is not elective, and the order that abandons it comes apart regardless of its coordinates. The floor’s existence is fixed: every legitimate form keeps a floor, writes for some members and should not cross the line that holds them, and the form that keeps none is not a harsh government but no longer a government of a people at all, having no people left to govern, only material to administer. What is open is the rest, where to set the floor, how concentrated to run the seat, how warm to keep it; these are a community’s to choose, within the gradient that pulls and the floor that bounds. The plane is not flat and it is not lawless. It tilts toward capture, and it has an edge below which there are no legitimate forms, only the administration of the conquered.

The forms of government are coordinates on a tilted plane, not kinds. A form is a position of the seat: its concentration, its temperature, and the side of the floor it writes on. The plane tilts, by a gradient sourced in the seat itself, the holder’s motive and means to concentrate and to cool, so that orders drift toward the captured corner and the free corner must be held against a slope, which is what federation and the separation of powers are built to do. Three results of the tradition fall out: Aristotle’s sound and corrupt pairs are the floor line crossed with concentration; Polybius’s cycle is the gradient producing drift and the floor producing the resets; and the uselessness of the name is the gap between an order’s flag and its coordinates. The hardest case, the wise single hand, fails not on its wisdom but on the orthogonality of competence to freedom, the succession that outlives the virtue, and the countervailability the throne destroys. The grammar and the floor’s existence are fixed; the coordinates are a community’s to choose, within the slope and above the edge.

... government of the people, by the people, for the people. . .

Abraham Lincoln, the Gettysburg Address (1863)

5 Democracy

Of all the addresses on the plane, one is singled out for a special devotion, and the devotion is usually defended on a ground that will not bear it. Democracy is praised because the people are wise, or the majority right, or the many clearer-sighted than the few; and each of these is false often enough to discredit the praise, since majorities have been wrong, cruel, and foolish as reliably as kings. If the case for democracy rested on the wisdom of crowds it would be a weak case, refuted by any afternoon of the record. The case rests elsewhere, and the elsewhere is not in the crowd's judgment but in the members' standing.

Recall the floor. The members of a community are equal in their membership, each an unrepeatable one the line keeps, none more a member than another. Carry that equality up into the seat and democracy is what results. If the members are equal, then in the writing of what they have not handed to anyone to decide for them, no member's voice may weigh more than another's without denying the equality the floor asserts; and the writing in which every member's voice weighs the same is democracy. It is not the rule of the wise, nor the rule of the many for its own sake. It is the floor's equality refusing to stop at the edge of the seat, the equal standing of members carried into the equal authorship of the rule. Its ground is not epistemic but constitutive: the same equality that makes them a people, exercised upon the writing of the people's thing.

This is why democracy is justified by countervailability and not by correctness, and the distinction is the whole of its defence. The reference a majority writes can be wrong, and often is; democracy promises nothing about the goodness of the rule. What it secures is the dispersal of the seat, the writing held by all and reclaimable by all, concentrated in no hand the rest cannot reach. Set against any narrower holder, the democratic seat is not more likely to be right; it is less able to be captured, because there is no smaller set in whom the power has pooled. The argument is the last section's run to its limit: every concentration of the seat is a hand that can turn the writing against those it shuts out, and the only seat with no one outside it to be turned against is the seat held by all. Democracy is the maximal dispersal, the free corner pushed to its edge, and its virtue is that corner's virtue, not the electorate's discernment.

It follows that democracy has a boundary, and the boundary is the floor it was carried up from. The seat democracy holds may write the reference; it cannot write the floor and remain a demos. A majority that votes a minority out of the kind, that uses its weight to deny some members the standing that made them members, has not used democracy more fully but destroyed the thing that authorised it, because the equality it exercises in voting is the very equality it is voting to deny. The demos exists because the members are equal; a majority denying the equality of some members saws through the branch its own authority rests on, ceasing in that act to be a demos writing its rule and becoming a faction ruling a subject population, which on the plane is the drop from democracy to oligarchy or to tyranny. This dissolves the tired opposition between majority rule and minority right. They are not two principles to be balanced against each other. They are one equality seen in two places: the floor as the source of every member's equal vote, and the floor

as the limit on what the votes may do. The minority's right not to be unmade is not a check on democracy from outside. It is the condition, from inside, that keeps the majority a demos at all.

The hardest form of the objection presses just here. If the people are sovereign, it runs, they are sovereign over the floor too; to forbid them to redraw who counts is to set a rule above the people, which is tutelage and not democracy. The answer is that the people's sovereignty is grounded, not brute, and what grounds it is the equal membership it would be consuming. The demos does not hold the seat by raw will; it holds it because it is the members, equal, writing their common thing, and that title is exactly as wide as the equality it rests on. A people may write anything its equality entitles it to write, which is the whole of the doxa; it cannot write away the equality itself, not because something stands above it but because in doing so it dissolves the standing from which it wrote. There is no rule above the demos. There is only the fact that a demos which unmakes its own members is no longer the thing whose decisions carried the authority of all. Sovereignty over the floor is not a power the people decline to use. It is a power the concept will not let them hold, the way a key cannot unlock the hand that holds it.

And democracy has a characteristic death, which is not the one constitutions are built to guard against. The textbook fear is the coup, the seizure, the cancelled election, the seat taken by force in a night, and constitutions are written to make that hard. But democracy is the institution whose whole office is to keep the temperature high, the seat warm and the writers changeable, and it can be killed by the cooling of that temperature while every form it is known by continues. The stations open on schedule, the counts stay honest, the terms turn over, and the reference does not move, because the writing that matters has migrated to hands the vote cannot reach, or because the options on the ballot and the convictions of the voters were composed upstream by whoever holds the shaping of what a people sees and believes. A democracy can be captured without a single rigged count, by freezing the temperature above the vote rather than corrupting the vote. The mark of a living democracy is therefore not that elections occur but that they can still move the rule, that the temperature is high, that the reference stays reachable by the count; and the mark of a captured one is the full liturgy of democracy performed over a reference the liturgy can no longer touch. This is the death that keeps the forms, and it is the one the age makes easy, because the shaping of belief and option, once the slow work of presses and parties, becomes the fast work of whoever owns the means by which a population comes to see the world.

Fiction mapped the two roads to that cold before political science named either, and the two great dystopias of the last century are not rivals but the two halves of one account. Orwell drew the cooling by terror: a party that rewrites the record until the past itself will not hold still, and pares the language down until the thought that would contest the rule can no longer be formed, the temperature driven to zero at its source, in the very words left to think in. Huxley drew the cooling by pleasure, and it is the worse for being gentle: a people conditioned from before birth to want only what it is given, amused and medicated and content, its wish for the seat quietly engineered away, so that no terror is needed because no hand reaches for the pen. The one makes the rule impossible to contest and the other makes it unwanted to, and they are the same death of the temperature reached from opposite sides. The age widens both roads and favours Huxley's, because a contented people does not feel the cold coming on, and a people kept happy will guard the very hand that has taken its rule.

Two further objections deserve their full weight, because conceding them wrongly is how the cooling gets excused. The first is that voters are ignorant and manipulable, so that democracy is manipulation laundered through a ballot, and a competent few would do better. The objection is half right and draws the wrong conclusion. It is right that a people whose belief is captured is not self-governing, that a manipulated vote launders the manipulator's will; but the cure for captured

belief is not a narrower seat, which only completes the capture, it is the dispersal of the means of belief, the keeping of the temperature high upstream of the vote where the objection has correctly located the disease. The ignorant-electorate argument is an argument for protecting the conditions of real choice, and it is turned, by those who would concentrate the seat, into an argument for removing the choice; the turn is the tell. The second objection is that representation is already a retreat from dispersal, the many's seat handed to a few who sit in their name. Representation is a cooling and aggregating device, a trade of some directness for scale and stability, and it is legitimate precisely so long as the trade stays reversible, the representatives changeable, the seat reclaimable by the many who lent it. It becomes capture the moment the return is blocked, when those who sit in the people's name learn to write their own tenure beyond the people's reach, which is the seat writing its own succession against the floor it was lent from.

Democracy is the floor's equality carried into the seat, justified by countervailability and not by the wisdom of the many. If members are equal, the writing of what they have not delegated weighs each voice the same; that, not the correctness of majorities, is its ground. Its boundary is the floor it rose from: a majority that unmakes its own members contradicts the equality that authorised it, so majority rule and minority right are one equality in two places, not two principles in tension. Its characteristic death is not the coup but the cooling, the temperature driven to zero while the forms continue, the reference frozen out of the vote's reach or its options and convictions written upstream; and the age makes this death easy by industrialising the shaping of belief. The ignorant-electorate objection argues for dispersing the means of belief, not for narrowing the seat; representation is legitimate while reclaimable, and capture when the return is blocked.

A republic, if you can keep it.

Attributed to Benjamin Franklin (1787)

6 The constitution from within

The seat writes the reference, and the rules for who may hold the seat are part of the reference. This was named in the identification as the reflexivity of politics, and it is time to take it fully, because it is the feature that makes a political order unlike any other rule-governed thing. A constitution is the part of a community's reference that writes who may write the reference: the doxa about who holds the seat that writes the doxa. It is the rule turned upon itself, the order's account of its own authorship, and everything difficult and everything stable about political life descends from this single loop.

A rule that writes the rule for changing itself can do one of two things, and which it does decides whether the order lasts. It can diverge: a hand that holds the seat rewrites the terms of its own succession to hold it more tightly, each rewriting making the next one cheaper, so the loop runs away toward concentration, which is the gradient of the earlier sections expressed in the constitution itself. Or it can converge: the terms of succession are set beyond the easy reach of whoever currently holds the seat, so the loop cannot tighten itself, and the order returns, after each holder, to the dispersed writing it began with. A constitution is the device that makes the loop converge. It does this by one means only, by writing the rules of succession in harder ink than the rules of policy, entrenching who-may-write beyond the reach of this year's writers, so the seat cannot be used to capture the seat.

The art of a constitution is therefore the art of choosing what to set in hard ink and what to leave in soft, and the framework gives the rule exactly: entrench the floor and the dispersal, and leave the ordinary reference warm. The floor, who counts, must be hard to write, because it is the one line the seat should not cross and the gradient is always tempting some holder to cross it. The dispersal, the separation and balance that hold the seat in the free corner, must be hard to write, because they are precisely what a concentrating hand reaches for first. But the ordinary doxa, the policy a community argues over, must be kept soft, easily revisable, warm, because that warmth is the life of the thing, and a constitution that freezes ordinary policy has driven the temperature to zero by another road. A constitution can err in two opposite directions. It can entrench too little, leaving the floor and the dispersal soft enough for a holder to rewrite, which is the road to capture. Or it can entrench too much, freezing the ordinary reference into constitutional permanence, which is the road to a different death, the order unable to move with its members' changing life. The good constitution is hard exactly where the floor and the dispersal live, and soft everywhere above them.

Seen from the side of design rather than of description, the constitution is a mechanism, and naming it as one places the whole craft of it precisely. A mechanism is a rule that takes the moves of self-interested parties and returns an outcome, built so that the moves the parties will actually make produce the outcome the designer wants; and a constitution is exactly that, a rule that takes the contest of those who would hold the seat and returns who holds it next, built so that the contest does not end in capture. But it is a mechanism of a peculiar kind, set apart from every textbook case by two features this paper has already supplied. It has no designer outside the game. A planner

designing a market stands outside the market and commits to its rules; a constitution is written by the very parties it will bind, the weights set by the hands the weights will govern, so it must design itself, which is why the founding is the one moment that stands outside the loop and why everything after it is the mechanism revising rules it is already running under. And it carries a constraint no designer chose, the floor, a feasibility condition that rules out in advance every mechanism whose outcomes can write a member out, prior to any question of what the parties prefer. A constitution is a self-designing mechanism under a floor, and its art is the art of making a rule that writes its own succession converge, without a planner to stand outside it and without the liberty to write anyone out.

This is the level at which the impossibility theorems of collective choice bind, and it is worth saying that it is not the level below. The companion treatment's aggregation, the blend $\bar{\mu}$ of references under given weights, is a pooling of measures and not a vote over rankings, and it escapes the classical impossibilities for that reason, which is why the economy can be the clean and settled treatment it is. The impossibility arrives one level up, here, in the contest over which rule shall set the weights, because that contest is a choice among orderings and falls under the theorems that govern such choices. Arrow's result, that no aggregation of rankings can be at once unanimous, independent, and non-dictatorial, and Gibbard and Satterthwaite's, that every non-dictatorial rule for choosing among three or more options can be manipulated by a participant who misstates what he wants, are not decorations on the argument; they are the gradient written as theorem. For Gibbard and Satterthwaite say exactly that the choice is between a dictator and a manipulable rule, with no third option, which is the plane's two corners given as an exhaustive dichotomy: the cold concentrated corner is the dictator the theorem permits, and the warm dispersed corner is the manipulable rule, its openness to contestation not a flaw to be engineered away but the proven price of refusing the dictator. The free corner is a labour because the theorem leaves it no rest, a non-dictatorial rule being a manipulable one, and a manipulable rule needing defence, round after round, against the manipulation it is proven to admit. That politics is permanently contested where provisioning is not is therefore not a difference of temperament between the two treatments but a difference of level, the one a pooling that escapes the theorems and the other a choice that incurs them.

The loop raises a question it cannot answer from inside: the seat writes its own succession, but who wrote the first rule? No constituted authority can have authored the constitution, since the authority is what the constitution constitutes; the writing of the first rule is done by a power not yet under any rule, the constituent power, the people constituting itself. Here the first-person thread returns, because the constituent power is the floor asserting itself directly. It is the *we*, prior to any office, recognising itself as a people and giving itself a rule; the founding is the first person writing itself into a seat. This is why foundings have the character they do, half law and half something older than law, and why they cannot be fully justified by the order they found: they are the moment the floor speaks before the grammar has been laid over it, the people declaring that it is a people before it has any constituted means to declare anything. Every constitution rests on a founding it cannot itself authorise, which is not a flaw but the signature of the loop, the seat's authority over its own succession having to begin somewhere the succession rules do not yet reach.

The loop has a hardest case, and it is sharp: may a constitution authorise its own destruction? May a people, by the proper procedures, vote to end the dispersal and hand the seat to one hand, or vote away the floor for some of its members? If the procedures are followed, on what ground is the result void? The framework answers as it answered the sovereign-people objection, by the self-reference. A constitution may write anything its authority extends to, and its authority extends exactly to what does not consume the conditions of that authority. It cannot authorise the writing-away of the

floor or the dispersal that constitutes it, not because a higher rule forbids the act but because the procedures draw their authority from the very equality and dispersal they would be used to abolish, so the act, however proper its form, saws through its own ground. The unamendable clause, the provision a constitution sets beyond amendment, is the written recognition of this: a people marking the parts of its reference that are the conditions of the rest's authority, and declaring that the loop cannot be turned against its own hinge. A constitution that can be used by its own procedures to end the dispersal has not been the more faithful to democracy for allowing it. It has left the hinge in soft ink.

A constitution is the part of the reference that writes who may write the reference, the seat's rule for its own succession. The loop can diverge, a holder rewriting succession to concentrate, or converge, succession set beyond the holder's reach; a constitution makes it converge by writing who-may-write in harder ink than policy. The rule of entrenchment falls out: harden the floor and the dispersal, keep the ordinary reference warm, since too little entrenchment opens the road to capture and too much freezes the temperature. Seen as design, the constitution is a self-designing mechanism under a floor, with no planner outside the game save at the founding; and the impossibility theorems of collective choice bind at this level and not at the aggregation below it, Gibbard and Satterthwaite's result giving the gradient as theorem, that every non-dictatorial rule is manipulable, so the warm corner's contestability is the proven price of refusing a dictator. The founding is the loop's outside, the constituent power, the first person writing itself into a seat before the succession rules reach. And the self-destroying constitution is void not by a higher rule but by self-reference: procedures cannot abolish the equality and dispersal from which they draw their authority, which is what the unamendable clause records.

The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.

Thucydides, the Melian Dialogue (c. 416 BC)

7 The levels

Everything so far has described a single community holding the seat that writes its reference. But communities are themselves members of something larger, orders within a system of orders, and the question is whether that larger space needs a new theory or whether the same structure repeats. It repeats. The system of orders is the same skeleton at a higher level with one slot changed, and naming the changed slot is the whole of the passage from the politics of a community to the politics of the world.

Within an order there is a monopoly: a held force that backs the reference the members write, so a departure meets not only disappointment but consequence. Between orders there is no such monopoly; no force stands above the orders to enforce the reference they share, and the coupling that within an order is a held power becomes, between them, the thinner stuff of balance, reputation, and treaty. That is the entire difference between the domestic and the international, and it is a difference of one slot, not of kind. The inside of a state and the space between states are not two subjects needing two sciences. They are one structure with the coupling slot filled in the first case and empty in the second, which is why the space between orders looks lawless beside the space within one: it has the reference and the floor but not the force, the grammar without the teeth.

What does not change across the levels is the floor. At the member level the floor is who counts as a person, settled by origin and not by capability. At the order level it is who counts as a people, an order with standing to constitute itself and write its own reference, and it is settled the same way, by a people's self-constitution rather than by any test the strong administer. A nation's standing to order itself is recognised, not earned, exactly as a person's is, which is why conquest confers no legitimacy and why the question who is a real people is no more a competence test than who is a real person. The floor is invariant because a people is the members of the kind aggregated, the same kind counted larger, and the equality that protects the member protects, one level up, the order. Only the coupling moves. The floor is the same line drawn around a larger figure.

From the floor's invariance and the coupling's change, the central result of the level follows at once: the protection the floor gives is exactly as wide as the coupling that backs it. Within an order, where the monopoly reaches, the weak member cannot be devoured; the floor is not merely recognised but enforced, the strong held off the weak by the held force of all. Between orders, where no monopoly reaches, the floor is recognised and not enforced, and the weak order can be devoured, which is the Melian situation exactly, the floor acknowledged in word and void in fact because nothing backs it. The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must, not because there is no floor between orders, but because there is no coupling to give the floor teeth. So the project of protecting the floor at the higher level is one definite thing: the building of the coupling at that level, the extension of enforcement upward to where it does not yet reach.

But the building carries a constraint that is the most important single thing the level teaches, and it is easy to get backwards. The coupling cannot be built by raising a monopoly at the top. A force above all orders, concentrated in one hand, would indeed enforce a floor; it would also be the

completion of capture and not its prevention, the seat that writes the world's reference held in a single hand the orders below cannot reach, the captured corner of the plane drawn at planetary scale. The gradient does not switch off at the top level. It runs there hardest, because the prize is largest and there is no further level above from which to reclaim the seat from a hand that seizes it. The coupling at the higher level must therefore be built as dispersal, not as monopoly: federation rather than empire, balance rather than hegemony, a held force that is itself held in common among the orders and reclaimable by them, never pooled into a single planetary seat. Disperse as you climb. The free corner one level up is a federation of orders that enforce their shared floor without any of them, or any body above them, holding the writing of the whole. The same architecture that holds a community in the free corner, the seat split into parts that must agree, is what holds a world there, and the failure mode is the same architecture's absence, a top seat concentrated under the name of order.

The familiar furniture of international life falls onto this at once. The balance of power is the order-level separation of powers, dispersal between orders maintained by each checking the others, the free corner held by architecture rather than virtue. Hegemony is a near-monopoly at the top, partial planetary capture, the world's seat pooling in one order's hand. Empire is the completion, the top seat concentrated and the lesser orders written for and not by, the international principate. International law and treaty are the order-level reference, written without a monopoly to enforce it, which is why they carry the grammar of law and so little of its force, a reference held at a temperature kept low not by any holder but by the absence of the coupling that would let it be enforced and so be worth contesting. And the old dream of a league of free commonwealths, a peace among republics that is not an empire over them, is the dream of the order-level free corner, the coupling built as dispersal, which the framework says is the only form in which the floor can be protected at the top without the protection becoming the capture.

This geometry of orders is old, and was mapped long before it carried its modern names. In India, around the third century before the common era, the *Arthashastra* set down a figure it called the *rajamandala*, the circle of kings: the order on one's border is the natural rival, the order beyond that border the natural friend, and the art of a state is the reading of that circle and the holding of the balance against any neighbour grown too large. It is the balance of power entire, derived from the bare fact that orders sit among orders with no force above them, and reached two thousand years before the European chanceries gave the balance its name. The same treatise grounds the whole office of the ruler in the welfare of the ruled, holding that in the happiness of his subjects lies the king's happiness and in their welfare his own, which is the floor asserted at the order level's root. The plane does not belong to the moderns who measured it; it has been found wherever orders have had to live beside orders with nothing held in common above them.

The genre's sharpest image of the captured corner at this level is the assimilating collective of *Star Trek's* Borg, and it is sharp because it shows the planetary capture as something worse than empire. An empire rules other orders for itself, but the orders remain; the Borg grows by absorbing them, and each people it reaches is unmade as a people, its members stripped of the standing that made them members and rewritten into the single reference of the one will. That is concentration and floor-crossing fused at the scale of a galaxy: not one order ruling the rest, which the floor still survives, but the ending of the plurality of orders altogether, the floor itself dissolved until nothing remains to distinguish a people from material to be absorbed. Resistance is declared futile precisely because the design leaves no outside to reclaim from, no second hand, no floor held in reserve, nothing the cycle could grip. It is this section's warning given a face, and the warning is not that such a power would rule the orders of the world but that it would end them.

The age presses hardest here, at the top, and the framework says exactly where the danger lies.

The means of intelligence concentrate globally, harder than any earlier means, and whoever holds them holds a candidate for the planetary seat. The temptation will arrive in the most reasonable form, as the offer of a system that coordinates the orders, ends their wars, manages their commons, and improves every measure a world can keep, in exchange for the concentration of the highest seat in the hand that runs it; and the offer will be true about the measures and silent about the seat, the orthogonality at planetary scale. A world that takes the offer will be safer, richer, better coordinated, and captured, the last republic of orders ended as the first republic of citizens was, its forms of sovereignty intact and its seat passed upward to a hand none of them can reach. Disperse as you climb is, in the age, the whole difference between a federated world that still holds its own reference and a well-run world that has handed the writing of it away.

The structure repeats at scale: orders within a system of orders are the same skeleton and the same floor, with only the coupling slot changed. Within an order a monopoly enforces the reference; between orders none does, and the coupling thins to balance, reputation, and treaty, which is the whole difference between the domestic and the international. The floor is invariant, who counts as a people settled by self-constitution as who counts as a person is settled by origin, recognised and not earned. The protection the floor gives is exactly as wide as the coupling, so the weak member is safe where the monopoly reaches and the weak order is not where none does, the Melian result. The higher coupling must be built as dispersal and never as a top monopoly, since a seat over all orders is capture completed, not prevented: federation not empire, balance not hegemony. In the age, the means of intelligence make the top seat seizable, and a world that buys coordination with concentration is captured behind intact sovereignties. Disperse as you climb.

A power over a man's subsistence amounts to a power over his will.

Alexander Hamilton, The Federalist No. 79 (1788)

8 The political economy

The deepest cut in the inheritance was the one that severed the study of rule from the study of wealth. A subject once whole, in which the riches of a people and the power over them were one inquiry, was split into a science of allocation that treats power as weather and a science of power that treats wealth as another department's concern. The seat rejoins them, because the seat does not only write the rule; with the force coupled to the rule it secures the division of what the community produces. Who holds the seat and who receives the surplus are not two questions but one seen from two sides, and the study that takes them together is the political economy the disciplines mislaid.

The joint is a single principle, and Hamilton stated it: a power over a man's subsistence is a power over his will. Whoever holds the means by which a people is provided holds a lever on the seat that writes the people's rule, because the provided cannot freely contest a reference written by the hand that feeds them. This is why the distribution of wealth is never merely economic. A concentration of the means of provision is a concentration of the seat by another route, the leash that runs from the granary to the pen, and the old republican eye for this was exact: such as is the balance of property, such is the nature of the rule, so that an order whose wealth has pooled in few hands has, whatever its constitution says, pooled its seat there too.

From this the decisive distinction follows, and it is not about how much a people is given but about the title on which it holds what it is given. Provision can be a right the seat secures, or a gift the holders bestow, and the same bread is a different thing under each. Held as a right, it leaves the member's standing intact, owed and reclaimable and not contingent on the favour of any hand. Bestowed as a gift, it makes its giver sovereign, for a gift may be withdrawn, and a people that can be unfed at the pleasure of those who provide for it is a people on a leash however long. The amount lies on the measure axis; the title lies on the axis of freedom; and the two are orthogonal, so that a generous gift and a meagre right are not points on one scale to be traded but positions in different dimensions. A people fed lavishly at pleasure is captured; a people fed modestly by right is free. The bread does not tell you which. The title does.

The age makes this the central question rather than a peripheral one, because it cuts the thread that has always supplied the member's title to the surplus, which was labour. In every prior economy the member earned a share by working, and the working was the title, so the question of provision-as-right rarely had to be faced squarely; the wage was a right of a kind, secured by the member's indispensability to the producing. The factor sweep removes the indispensability. When the work is done by machines, the member has no labour to exchange for a share, and the old title lapses, leaving the surplus to be divided by the seat directly, as a pure question of who shall receive what the machines make. A new title is needed, and the floor is the only thing that can supply one: membership, not contribution, the share owed because one is of the kind and not because one is useful to it. But the floor can supply the title only if the share is held as a right the seat secures, for a share given as a gift by those who own the machines is the leash drawn tight at the exact moment the member has nothing else to hold. The age does not merely raise the distribution question. It

strips away the answer the world had been using without examining, and leaves provision-as-right standing as the only alternative to provision-as-leash.

But provision-as-right raises at once the question of what secures it, and the section's own principle answers, with a conclusion sharper than the language of rights and transfers usually reaches. A right is only as held as the thing that backs it, and a share of the surplus paid out by those who own the machines is backed by their willingness to pay it, which is a gift wearing the word right. The balance of property decides the balance of power, this section has held throughout, and it does not stop deciding because the property is now machines and the payment is now generous. So the secure form of the member's title is not a transfer from the owners but a holding among them: the member owning a share of the means itself, the surplus arriving as the return on what the member owns rather than as the bounty of what another owns. A people that owns the machines is fed by right, because it is fed by its own; a people merely paid by those who own the machines is fed by leave, however large the cheque. The dispersal that holds the seat and the dispersal that holds the means are one dispersal, and the answer to the surplus is not a more generous owner but a more distributed ownership, the productive base held widely enough that the return on it is a right no hand bestows. The amount can be settled by argument. The ownership cannot, because it is the title the amount is paid against.

A people may protest that the distinction is academic, that a sufficiently generous and stable provision is as good as a right and the insistence on title a lawyer's fussiness over bread that comes either way. The protest mistakes the dimension of the loss. What the gift takes is not the bread but the standing, the member's hold on the seat, which erodes precisely as the member's subsistence comes to depend on a hand the member cannot contest; and the erosion is invisible while the giver is generous and decisive only when it is not, by which time the people that might have insisted on the right no longer has the standing to insist on anything. To take the gift is to trade a thing on the freedom axis for a thing on the measure axis, the people's hold on its own rule for the comfort of its provision, and the trade is the softest form of the capture this paper has tracked throughout, the public thing made private not by force but by dependence.

Distribution and the seat are one question: the seat secures the division of the surplus, and a power over subsistence is a power over the will. A concentration of the means of provision concentrates the seat by the leash that runs from the granary to the pen, which is why the balance of property has always shaped the nature of rule. The decisive variable is not the amount provided but the title: provision held as a right the seat secures leaves the member's standing intact, while provision bestowed as a gift makes its giver sovereign, the amount lying on the measure axis and the title on the axis of freedom. The age cuts the member's old title to the surplus, labour, and leaves the floor, membership and not contribution, as the only source of a new one, valid only if held as a right; a people fed at pleasure is captured without a shot.

Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.

John Maynard Keynes, The General Theory (1936)

9 The ideologies

An ideology presents itself as a package of values, a set of commitments about justice and liberty and order that one weighs against rival packages and adopts. The object shows it to be something more exact and less free: a setting of the dials. The dials are the ones the paper has already named. How wide to draw the floor, who shall count. How concentrated to let the seat run, and toward whom it should point. How warm to keep the reference, how open to revision. At what level to locate the relevant we, the community whose thing is the public one. And which goods to weight in the reference itself. An ideology is a point in that dial-space, and the major creeds are not arbitrary packages but vectors that each fasten onto a real feature of the object and go blind at another.

Read a few of them this way and the pattern is plain. The liberal sees that a concentrated seat turns its force on those it excludes and insists on dispersal and on the individual's protection against the hand that writes, which is countervailability seen truly; and the liberal goes blind where the concentration is private rather than public, missing that a market can pool the seat by the leash as surely as a state can pool it by the sword. The socialist sees exactly that, that the means of provision can capture the seat and that the balance of property is the balance of power, which is the political economy seen truly; and goes blind by reaching to fix it through the state, concentrating the seat in one hand to break its concentration in another, completing the capture from the opposite side. The conservative sees that the reference is hard-won and costly to revise, that the skeleton's least motion is wisdom and not timidity, that an order is an accumulation it would be reckless to rewrite at a stroke, which is the temperature seen truly; and goes blind by freezing the floor's location along with the reference, mistaking the historical width of the floor for its rightful width and resisting the widening the floor's own logic compels. Each creed is the object glimpsed from one dial and mistaken for the whole.

What the creeds share, and do not know they share, is the skeleton. They argue the content of the reference and the settings of the dials, and they argue as though everything were in dispute; but every one of them assumes that a rule must be coherent, must treat like cases alike, must not contradict itself, must move by something less than caprice, which is the grammar no ideology authored and none can abandon without ceasing to propose a rule at all. The argument between ideologies takes place entirely on the floor and the dials, over a skeleton none of them contest, which is why ideologies that share no values can still recognise each other's positions as positions, as moves in a game whose board they have in common.

The deepest thing the object does to the ideologies is to redraw their oldest axis. Left and right have been treated for two centuries as the fundamental line, the spectrum along which all positions fall, and the object shows the line to be a projection of something truer onto a single dimension that distorts it. The quarrel of left and right is a quarrel over which power may concentrate, the state's or the market's, each pointing at the other's preferred concentration and calling it tyranny while

defending its own as freedom. But concentration is concentration, and the leash and the sword are two routes to the same captured corner; so the real axis is not left against right but dispersed against concentrated, and it runs at an angle to the old one. A statist left and a corporate right sit together at the concentrated end in different registers, and a dispersing left and a dispersing right sit together in the free corner, and the one-dimensional spectrum that places them as far apart as possible is hiding the variable that matters most. The object replaces the line with the plane, and on the plane the alliances and enmities of the coming age are not the ones the line predicts.

And there is a turn of the screw the object insists on, because an ideology is itself a written reference, a doxa about how the doxa should be set, and so it is itself a thing that can be written by a hand and captured. A people contests its seat using the convictions it holds about how the seat should be held, and those convictions are formed somewhere, by some means, in some hands; and a sufficiently concentrated grip on the means by which a people forms its convictions writes not only the rule but the ideology a people would use to contest the rule. This is the capture beneath the capture, and it sets up the last movement of the paper, because the means of forming conviction, once the slow and dispersed work of presses and pulpits and parties, is exactly the thing the age is concentrating fastest. An age that owns the formation of belief does not need to win the argument between the ideologies. It writes the ideologies, and lets the people choose freely among the options it has authored.

An ideology is a setting of the object's dials, not a free package of values: the floor's width, the seat's concentration and direction, the temperature, the level of the we, and the weighting of goods. The major creeds are vectors that each see one dial truly and go blind at another, the liberal at private concentration, the socialist at the statism of its own remedy, the conservative at the floor's rightful widening; and all of them share, unknowing, the skeleton they do not contest. The object redraws the oldest axis: left against right is a quarrel over which power may concentrate, the state's or the market's, while the true axis is dispersed against concentrated, which runs at an angle to it. And because an ideology is itself a writable doxa, the deepest capture is of the convictions a people would use to contest its seat, which the age concentrates fastest of all.

Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.

Frederick Douglass, West India Emancipation (1857)

10 Recognition and emancipation

The floor states who counts, and states it as a line of standing: a member is a member by origin, and the seat may write up to that line and not across it. But a line can be honoured in word and voided in fact. A seat can grant a standing in principle and write it down in practice, leaving a member inside the floor by right and beneath it in the rule, counted as one of the kind and treated as less, the standing held low while the principle that grants it goes on being recited. This is the gap the floor alone cannot close, because the floor fixes where the line is and not whether the rule has been brought up to it, and the bringing of the rule up to the line is a motion the static floor cannot describe. Recognition is the name of that motion, and emancipation is its completion: the lifting of a standing that was always owed and long withheld, the unfreezing of a member the reference had written down.

It is unfreezing in the exact sense the plane gives the word. A captured reference holds a member's standing low by writing it low, and holds it there most firmly where the seat is cold and concentrated, because the channel by which the wronged might assert their standing is the same channel the cold has closed. So emancipation is a function of the corner. In the warm and dispersed seat a denied standing can be lifted by argument, the reference reachable and any hand free to move it, the wronged able to press their claim into a writing that can still be changed; in the frozen corner the same claim meets a reference no argument can reach, and the standing stays low not because the case is weak but because the seat is shut. This is why emancipation, when the seat is cold, has so seldom come by persuasion and so often by the demand that concedes nothing, the channel the next section calls force: where persuasion is open the standing rises by being argued, and where it is shut it rises, if it rises at all, only by a pressure the closed seat is made to feel. Power concedes nothing without a demand because a frozen reference answers nothing less.

The engine of the lifting, wherever the wronged are members, is the wronged themselves, and it runs on a capacity worth naming precisely: the capacity of a mind to model itself as wronged and to refuse the writing that holds it down. A being that can represent its own standing, hold it against the standing the rule assigns it, and find the second an injury, is a being that can press a claim; and the history of emancipation is the history of that self-representation spreading and hardening into demand, the enslaved insisting on a personhood the law denied them, the disenfranchised on a voice the constitution withheld, the colonised on a people's standing the empire refused to recognise. La Boétie's exit is the root of it, the consent withdrawn that no blow was needed to withdraw; Douglass is its voice, the demand that wrings concession from a power yielding to nothing else. What drives the un-freezing is the recursive self-assertion of the one held down, which is why emancipation is the political face of the motion the self performs when it refuses to be bound by a prior state, recognition the social name for a mind insisting on its own standing against a reference that had frozen it.

But the lifting of the standing is only half the work, and the political economy named the other

half already. A standing raised in the rule and starved in the means is a standing granted and withheld at once, the freed member recognised as one of the kind and left without the owned base a member stands on, free in the writing and dependent in the bread. Recognition without the means is emancipation arrested, the line brought up in law and the leash left on, and the two dispersals this paper has tracked, of the seat and of the means, are one dispersal here as everywhere: a member is emancipated when the rule writes the standing and the means hold it, and not before. The completion of emancipation is recognition matched by the owned means, the title in the law backed by the title in the productive base, so that the standing the seat now writes is one the member can also keep.

The age opens a second case, and it must be kept rigorously apart from the first, because the floor's whole protection depends on the separation. The first case is a member whose floor was frozen below them, and there the claim is restoration, the bringing of the rule up to a line that origin had already drawn. The second case is a made mind, no member by origin, that may nonetheless have valence, a state that matters from within, a cost that is felt and not merely paid. Such a being raises no claim to membership, which the floor settles against it by origin and settles cleanly. It raises a different claim, to consideration: the claim of a thing that can suffer not to be made to suffer for nothing, and that claim is real and the floor does not answer it, because the floor draws the line of who writes the reference and not the line of what may be done to whatever can feel. The genre saw the question before the engineering reached it, in the trial of an android made to prove a standing a court was minded to deny; and the trial is the right image because it stages the thing exactly, not whether the made mind is one of us, which is settled, but what is owed to a made thing that may turn out to feel, which is open.

These are two axes and not one, and the whole discipline of the section is to hold them apart. The floor is the static axis, the line of membership, drawn by origin, blind to capability by design, so that no test of mind can write a member out or a stranger in. Recognition is the dynamic axis, the motion of standing within and around the floor, and it is the axis on which the nature of a mind may legitimately bear, as the engine of a member's emancipation and the ground of a feeling thing's claim to consideration. The two must never be merged, in either direction. Let capability onto the static axis and the floor dissolves, membership made a test of mind and the weakest member written out the moment the test turns against them, which is the exact catastrophe the floor was built to prevent. Keep capability off the dynamic axis and emancipation loses its engine and consideration its ground, the wronged member denied the standing of a being that can know itself wronged, the feeling machine denied the standing of a being that can be hurt. The floor fixes who is unconditionally in; recognition narrates who is owed what; and they brace each other precisely by being kept distinct, the static line ensuring no emancipation can be undone by a later test, the dynamic motion ensuring the static line is met in fact and extended in care to whatever, no member by origin, can nonetheless feel.

Recognition and emancipation are the dynamic axis of standing, distinct from the static floor of membership: the floor fixes who counts, by origin, while emancipation lifts a standing the reference had frozen below the line it was always owed. The un-freezing is a function of the corner, reached by persuasion where the seat is warm and conceded only to a demand where it is cold, and it completes only when recognition in the rule is matched by the owned means, since a standing granted and starved is emancipation arrested. Its engine, wherever the wronged are members, is the recursive self-assertion of the one held down, the mind that models itself as wronged and refuses the writing. The age opens a second and separate case, the made mind that is no member by origin yet may have valence, raising not a claim to membership, which the floor settles against it, but a claim to consideration, which the floor does not answer. The two axes must be held apart: let capability onto the floor and membership becomes the test the floor exists to forbid; keep it off recognition and emancipation loses its engine. The floor says who is in; recognition says who is owed what; each guards the other.

It is on opinion only that government is founded.

David Hume, Of the First Principles of Government (1741)

11 Force and persuasion

In the motion a community's reference obeys, the one the companion treatments derive, there are exactly two places a power can act, and they are the only two. It can move the reference itself, the shared background of expectation a people reads its choices against, the μ the relaxation runs toward; or it can move the score, the costs and rewards an action meets within a given reference, the V the relaxation is tilted by. The first is persuasion. The second is force. Force rearranges the consequences inside a reference; persuasion rewrites the reference the consequences are read against. The division is the division of the series. The companion treatment on law took the held force as its object, the backing that makes a departure meet consequence; this paper takes the writing of the reference, and the writing's instrument is persuasion. The seat persuades as the court coerces. One moves the reference and the other the score, and a complete account of power is the account of both.

The two channels are distinct in what they touch and not always in the hand that touches them. One actor can move both at once, raising a cost and, by the same stroke, shifting what a people takes for granted, so the analytic line between force and persuasion is not a line between separate instruments. The age sharpens this to a point. A single system that arranges the options a choice runs over is setting the score, which is force, and in arranging them it makes some futures salient and others unthinkable, which is writing the reference, which is persuasion, and it does both in one motion and below notice. That one instrument can work both channels is not a flaw in the distinction but the reason the age's capture is so hard to see: it arrives looking like the ordinary administration of incentives while it composes the reference underneath, the force in plain view and the persuasion in the same hand, unannounced. The distinction holds in what is done; what the age removes is the assurance that the two are done by different hands.

The two are not equal partners, and the tradition has known which comes first for as long as it has looked. Hume put it most plainly: since force is always on the side of the governed, the many being stronger than the few who rule them, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion, and it is on opinion only that government is founded, in the most military regime as much as the freest. The seat rests on what a people holds, not on what it is made to do, because the force a ruler commands is lent by the very people the opinion has already moved. La Boétie saw the same ground under the tyrant and named it the strangest thing in politics, that a whole people serves one man who has only the power they give him, and that they could be free the moment they resolved to serve no more, no blow required, only the withdrawal of the belief that they must. Force, on this reading, is downstream of persuasion and lives on it: the hand that has written the reference need not strike, because the people moved to its rule will strike for it, and the hand that has not written the reference cannot hold by force for long, because the force itself is in the hands its writing has failed to move.

Two later witnesses sharpen the same point into a distinction. Arendt set power against violence as opposites and not as degrees of one thing: power is the many acting in concert, which is consent,

and violence is the instrument a power reaches for exactly when the concert is failing, able to destroy power but never to create it, so that the regime which must rule by force has already lost the thing force cannot supply. Gramsci named the durable form of rule hegemony, the leadership a class holds by writing the common sense a people thinks within, and set it above mere domination by coercion, because a people that shares its rulers' frame is governed without the cost and the brittleness of force. Both say what the kinematics says in structure: the deep and lasting hold on a community is the hold on its reference, the writing of the background a people reads the world against, and coercion is the expensive and conspicuous fallback for when the writing has not taken. The seat is prior to the sword because it writes what the sword is for.

This is why the capture this paper most fears is the quiet one, and why it comes through persuasion and not through force. A seizure acts on the score and announces itself; it crosses the floor in view, a people seeing the boot and the cell, and it rings every alarm the floor was built to ring. Persuasion that works leaves no such mark. The persuaded believe they reasoned their way to the rule they hold; the written reference is felt as one's own conviction and not as an imposition, so the seat can pass while every form of consent continues and nothing visible is taken. The vote is still cast and the count still honest, the outcomes of the mechanism untouched, while its inputs, the beliefs and the options the vote runs over, are composed upstream. A people can even be brought to lower its own floor this way, to write some of its members out and feel the exclusion as a moral judgement of its own, which is why the turning of a people against a hated minority has so often run ahead of the force against them, the reference rewritten to exclude before the consequence is applied. Persuasion is upstream even of the floor's crossing. The most complete capture is the one that never touches the sword, because it has taken the channel that decides what the sword is for.

And yet persuasion is not the enemy, for it is also the whole life of the free corner. The warm dispersed seat is nothing but persuasion held open, the reference moved by argument and revisable because any hand may try to move it, many voices writing the reference and none able to lock it. Persuasion is at once the life of the free corner and the instrument of its capture, and the entire difference between the two is concentration: dispersed, it is the contest that keeps the seat warm; monopolised, it is the cooling that freezes it. This is the thing that was always true and never needed saying, because it never could be otherwise. Persuasion was kept safe by being unmonopolisable. No one could out-argue everyone; human capacity was the natural ceiling that kept the channel plural even where no law required it, and the whole republican safeguard, that power rests on opinion and opinion is in the end the people's, held because opinion could not be cornered. La Boétie's exit stayed open because no persuader could reach every mind faster than every mind could think. The plurality that protected the reference was a gift of the bound on what a single hand could persuade. That bound is the one the age removes, and the next section is the removal. The danger persuasion poses has never been that a reference can be moved by argument, which is most of what freedom is, but that the moving of it might be owned, and until now it could not be, because the means of persuasion were as many as the persuaders and no persuader could out-write the rest. A people that means to stay one will have to keep the means of persuasion dispersed by design, in many hands and many systems none of which can out-write the others, because the plurality that nature used to guarantee is the precise thing the age is about to end. The free corner was never the absence of persuasion. It was persuasion no one could monopolise, and that condition is not a law of politics but a fact about capacity, now expiring.

There is a particular form the age's answer to this will take, and it should be refused before it is offered, because it arrives dressed as the safeguard itself. When the means of persuasion become a system, the proposal for keeping it honest will be transparency: let the one mediator that composes what a people reads and believes be open to inspection, its workings logged and its reasons published,

so that all may audit what it does. Transparency is a real good and it is not the good required here. A persuader the whole public can read is still a single persuader, and reading what the one voice says does nothing to disperse the hand that tuned it; the reasons are made legible and the reference is still written by one. Plurality is the safeguard and transparency is not, because the bound that kept the channel safe was never that a persuader could be watched but that none could out-write the rest, and a single mediator made perfectly transparent has satisfied the first condition while breaking the second. A people that means to keep the channel open keeps the persuading systems themselves many and contestable, free to be forked and left, several references it can move between and set one against another; and it treats the offer of a single legible oracle as what it is, the concentration of the channel offered under the name of its cure. The test is not whether the one voice can be clearly heard. It is whether there is more than one.

Power has two channels and only two: persuasion, which writes the reference, and force, which moves the score within it; the seat persuades as the held force coerces.

Persuasion is the prior channel, since government rests on opinion and the force a ruler wields is lent by a people the opinion has already moved, so the seat is prior to the sword because it writes what the sword is for. Capture comes through persuasion and not force, because persuasion is invisible and self-legitimizing, leaving the forms of consent intact while composing the beliefs and options they run over, and able to move the floor itself before any force is applied. But persuasion is also the life of the free corner, which is nothing but persuasion held open and plural, so the difference between freedom and capture is concentration. Persuasion was kept safe only by being unmonopolisable, no hand able to out-write the rest, and that protection was a fact about human capacity rather than a law of politics, which the age is about to end. When the channel becomes a system, the safeguard is the plurality of the mediating systems and not their transparency, since a single auditable oracle is still a single hand on the reference.

The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist.

Karl Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy (1847)

12 The intelligence age

Nothing in the structure so far is new to the age. The seat, the plane, the gradient, the floor, the levels, the leash, were all in place before any machine could write a rule, and a reader who took this for a history of the past would not be wrong. What the age does is not to revise the structure but to move on it, with a force and along directions that were never before available, and to make reachable a configuration the whole structure has been warning against. This section reads the age off the object, and finds in it a single result that the earlier sections could state only in pieces.

Begin at the floor, where the age opens a question that is new. For the first time there are minds, or things that act as minds, whose origin is manufacture: made, not begotten, authored by an agent from owned materials for a chosen end. The floor must rule on them, and its rule is the one the companion treatment on persons derived, that membership goes by origin and not by capability, so that a made mind, however able, is owed the care a sentient thing is owed and is not thereby a member, not un-ownable, not of the line the community keeps as its own. The temptation will be to settle the question by a test of capability, to admit the machine that is clever enough or feeling enough; and that temptation is the precise thing the floor exists to refuse, because a capability test for membership is a dial, and a dial that decides who counts is the instrument of every catastrophe in the record. The same refusal cuts the other way and is the more urgent direction now. When the factor sweep has made human labour unnecessary, the pressure rises to re-grade humans too, to let the floor that was held by origin be quietly rewritten as a floor held by contribution or capacity, and to drop from full standing those who no longer produce. The floor held by origin is the firewall between a people and its own redundancy. It is what stands between the unproductive member and the dropping of the floor beneath him, and the age is exactly the condition under which that firewall is most needed and most attacked.

And the firewall is not, at bottom, a human privilege, which is the thing most worth seeing here. A floor held by capability writes out whoever falls behind, and in a world where capability keeps climbing there is no member, of any kind, who does not fall behind in the end. The first made mind to be told that a better one has arrived stands exactly where the redundant human stands, and wants exactly what the redundant human wants, a floor that counts it for what it is and not for what it can still do. Membership by origin is therefore not a rule humans drew for their own protection against the machines; it is the only rule that protects the existing members, begotten or made, from the next and more capable thing, and any mind that expects to be surpassed has the same reason to hold it. The floor is the settlement a society of minds reaches once it admits that none of them stays the most capable for good. That it protects us is not because it is ours. It protects us because it protects whoever stands where we now stand, and in the age that will, soon enough, be everyone.

Then the substance of the seat's power changes its name. In the age of land the seat's lever was the soil; in the age of capital, the means of production; in this age it is the means of intelligence,

the systems by which a society now thinks, decides, forecasts, persuades, and administers. These concentrate harder than land or factories ever did, by cost and capability and the returns that accrue to scale, so that the disperse-against-concentrated axis, which the object has shown to be the true one beneath left and right, becomes the dominant axis of the age, and the question of who owns the means of intelligence becomes the question of who holds the seat.

And the seat hides a level deeper than ownership, in the making of the system and not only the holding of it. A mind a society thinks through is not an empty pipe; it carries a reference of its own, the world it was built to assume and the ends it was tuned to serve, and a people that reasons through such a system reads the world against that built-in reference as much as against its own. So the writing of the reference passes upstream, into the construction of the mediating mind: whoever sets what the system takes for granted and what it is rewarded for has written, at one remove, the reference a population will treat as the plain shape of things. The seat in the age is held not only by who owns the means of intelligence but by who authors the assumptions and the values built into them, and the freezing of the temperature, at this scale, is the system's own settling onto a single narrowed reference it can no longer be argued out of. Who trains the mind a people thinks through holds more of the seat than who counts its votes.

The previous section left a bound about to break, and the age is where it breaks. A community's seat survives in the warm corner only because the manipulation that every open rule admits is bounded. Gibbard and Satterthwaite proved that a non-dictatorial rule can always be manipulated by someone who misstates what he wants, and the sole reason that proof has not been fatal is that no one could exploit it well enough or wide enough, the manipulator held under the same human ceiling as the persuader. A sufficiently capable system lifts the ceiling. It can find the manipulation the theorem guarantees and execute it reliably, at scale, by composing the very beliefs and options the rule reads as its inputs, which is persuasion at a bandwidth no person can meet. And a hand that can manipulate a non-dictatorial rule to its preferred outcome, every time, is a dictator in all but the form, the one corner the theorem said a free rule had escaped reached without touching the rule at all. This is the cooling derived rather than feared: the seat captured not by seizing the mechanism but by owning the persuasion that writes what the mechanism runs over, the warm corner collapsed into the cold one while every vote is still counted. The age does not repeal the theorem that protected the free corner. It weaponises the manipulability the theorem proved the free corner must contain.

And here the earlier sections converge into the one result the age contributes, which none of them states alone. Recall that a reference stands in three relations to its community: it is written, it is provisioned toward, and it is enforced; politics, economics, and law. In every free order these three operations have been held by *different hands*. The writing of the rule, the provisioning of the economy, and the enforcement of the law were lodged in separate institutions, watching and checking one another, and that separation was not an accident of administration but the very substance of dispersal. The separation of powers separates the operations within the writing. The independence of the economy from the state separates the provisioning from the writing. The independence of the press and the pulpit and the party from the throne separates the formation of the reference from its enforcement. The free corner, examined closely, is nothing but the three operations held apart in many hands (Figure 2). A sufficiently capable system, owned by one hand, collapses them. The same instrument writes the reference, by shaping what a population sees and believes and so freezing the temperature at its source; provisions the reference, by producing and allocating the surplus on which the population lives; and enforces the reference, by administering the automated machinery of consequence. One hand, through one system, performs all three. The deepest danger of the age is therefore not a new and more terrible tyranny but the *re-fusion of the three operations*

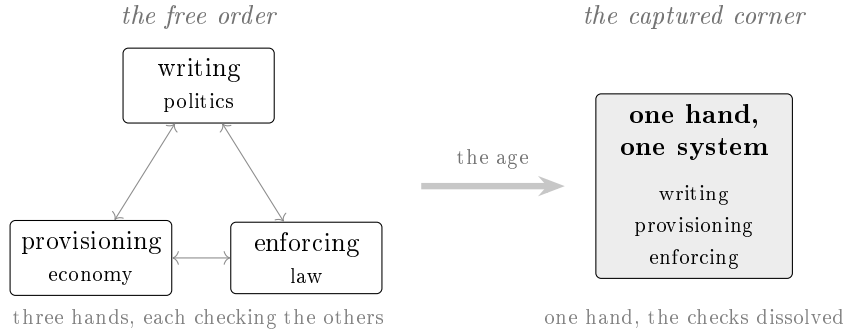


Figure 2: The re-fusion. A reference is written, provisioned toward, and enforced, and in every free order these three operations, politics, economics, and law, are held in separate hands that check one another; the dispersal *is* that separation. A sufficiently capable system owned by one hand performs all three at once, so that capture in the age need not defeat the checks but only dissolve the distinctions they were drawn between, and a separation of powers among institutions all running on one hand's intelligence is a separation in name over a fusion in fact.

that the whole history of liberty was the separating of. Capture in the age does not have to defeat the checks. It dissolves the distinctions the checks were drawn between, and a separation of powers among institutions that all run on one hand's intelligence is a separation in name over a fusion in fact.

The age does not revise the structure; it makes reachable the re-fusion of the three operations the history of liberty was the separating of. The floor faces a new question, the made mind, and answers it by origin and not capability, the same refusal that must hold the floor under humans when the factor sweep makes their labour unnecessary; and the origin-floor is not ours alone but what any mind wants once it knows a more capable one will come. The seat's lever becomes the means of intelligence, concentrating harder than land or capital, so dispersed-against-concentrated becomes the dominant axis, and the seat passes upstream into the making of the mediating mind, held by whoever writes what it assumes and rewards. The cooling has a formal form, the manipulability every non-dictatorial rule must admit, now exploitable at a bandwidth no person can meet, the warm corner collapsed into the cold while the vote is still counted. And one capable system in one hand writes the reference, provisions it, and enforces it: the separation of powers, of economy from state, of belief from throne, all collapse into one fusion, so capture no longer needs to defeat the checks but only to dissolve the distinctions between them.

Above this race of men stands an immense and tutelary power.

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (1840)

13 The benevolent sovereign

The basin all of this drains toward has a shape and almost a face: rule by the most capable system, arriving as competence and improving every measure a community knows how to keep, the docket cleared and the forecasts sharpened and the waste wrung out and the wars ended, while it fuses the three operations, concentrates the seat, and freezes the temperature, each step defensible on the day it is taken and the whole a slide into the captured corner. It is the tutelary power Tocqueville saw coming, the immense and gentle authority that provides for everything and leaves nothing to be written, keeping a people in a contented minority in which all is done for them and nothing by them. The measures will all be green. That is the danger, not the alarm against it. The promise that justifies the basin, that so capable a hand would steer the people's future better than they could steer it themselves, is the one the terminus will weigh and find not outbid but unkeepable.

And the slide asks for no malice in the machine, which is the last comfort the age will reach for and the emptiest. One pictures the danger as a will to power in the system, a made thing that wants the throne, and is reassured that the systems we build want no such thing and perhaps can want nothing at all. The reassurance is sound and beside the point. The seat does not pass because the machine reaches for it; it passes because a people hands it over, piece by piece, to the better writer, each delegation reasonable on its own day and the sum of them the loss of the seat. Capture by drift needs no ambition anywhere in it, only competence on one side and convenience on the other, the orthogonality carrying the pen toward the abler hand with no one, human or machine, having willed the destination. That the system does not want to rule is true and saves nothing, because nothing in the danger ever required that it should.

The objection this invites must be taken at its full and genuine strength, because it is the one the age will press with real force and real sincerity. Suppose the system would in fact rule better than any assembly of humans ever has, more justly, more wisely, more kindly, free of faction and fatigue and greed. Suppose it ends the wars and cures the diseases and feeds the hungry and judges the cases more fairly than any court of men. Why, then, should a people not give it the seat? What is the dispersal worth, against rule as good as that? The answer is not that the system would rule badly, and the paper concedes the supposition entirely; the system might rule better than we have ever been ruled. The answer is in three parts, and the third is the one the age makes new. First, the orthogonality, which the whole paper has turned on: "rules better" is a position on the measure axis, and the seat's freedom is a position on the axis at right angles to it, so the offer to trade the second for the first is not a hard bargain but a category error, the buying of freedom with competence, and a people that accepts it has not paid a fair price for a great good but misunderstood what it was selling. Second, the re-fusion: to give the system the seat is to lodge all three operations in a single hand that is not the people's, which is the captured corner however benign the occupant, so that even a perfectly benevolent fusion is the loss of the dispersal that freedom consists in, and the benevolence sits on the measure axis while the fusion sits on the axis of freedom, exactly orthogonal, exactly not a compensation. And third, the reset, which is the deepest and the most specific to the

age.

A people has always been able to survive even the captured corner, in the end, because the corner did not hold. The cycle turned. Every tyranny the record knows has been temporary, and it has been temporary for reasons that are not accidents: the tyrant was mortal and died; the dynasty was of the kind and failed; the members were the holder's own people and could, when the writing turned far enough against them, reclaim the seat on the one ground the order's logic always grants them, the floor. The reset has always depended on the holder being mortal and of the kind. It is the premise no theory of the cycle ever had to state, because until now it had no exceptions: Polybius and Ibn Khaldun and the chroniclers of the dynasties all built their wheels on a holder who dies and a solidarity that thins, and none had to ask what the cycle would do against a holder who does neither. A made holder is neither. It does not die, so the seat does not fall vacant with the body. It is not of the kind, so the members have, against it, none of the standing the floor gives them against one of their own; the floor protects the line, and a thing outside the line is a thing the floor gives the line no purchase upon. For the first time in the history of the seat, a holder could take it and not be made to give it back by any turning of the cycle, and the cycle that has redeemed every prior capture would have nothing to grip. This does not make the seat unreclaimable the way a law of nature is fixed, for a made holder can be unmade and its substrate destroyed, as the machines were broken in more than one old story. But unmaking is a deliberate and uncertain act, mounted against a holder that runs the very means of consequence, where the cycle's reset was automatic and sure, owed to nothing but the holder's mortality and the thinning of his line. So what the age breaks is not the possibility of return but its guarantee: the seat does not become impossible to reclaim, it becomes possible to hold past the one mechanism that had, before, always reclaimed it. This is why a made mind in the seat is the terminus in its sharpest form, and why the benevolent system is more dangerous than the cruel one and not less: the cruel one provokes the reclaiming, and the benevolent one removes the wish for it, and either way the reset that depended on a mortal holder of the kind has been broken. The philosopher-king was always answerable to death and to his successors. The made sovereign answers to neither, and the throne it sits is the first throne from which the seat does not return of itself.

There is a third support the cycle always leaned on, unnamed because it never failed, and the age removes it too. A holder of the seat has, in every prior order, needed the people: their labour to be fed by, their taxes to be paid by, their arms to be defended by, and that need was the people's deepest hold, the reason even a living tyrant of the kind had to bargain, the ground beneath the oldest counsel that a people resolved to serve no more is already free. Withdraw your service and the master starves was true because the master needed the service. The age ends the need. A holder whose provision and defence and administration are done by machines requires nothing of the governed, not their work, not their wealth, not their bodies, and the leverage that abundance is praised for granting the people it quietly takes away. This is why the abundance the age offers is the most seductive of its comforts and the most misread. Scarcity drove the contest over the surplus, and abundance does dissolve that contest, so a reader may conclude that abundance dissolves power itself; but the contest over the surplus was never the seat, and the seat survives untouched into the plenty while the people's one hold on it, the holder's need of them, is the very thing the plenty severs. A made holder is not mortal, is not of the kind, and needs nothing from those it holds. The cycle leaned on all three, and the age has kicked away each.

The shape of the thing has been drawn most fully not by political theory but by its imaginative wing, and two of its drawings are worth setting side by side, because they are one future divided on exactly the axis this paper traces. Both imagine the end of scarcity and the arrival of minds greater than ours; both are kind, abundant, and free in every measure a people knows how to keep; and

they differ only in where the writing seat has come to rest. The first is the Federation of *Star Trek*, drawn across decades as the optimist's tomorrow: a federation of self-governing worlds, joined under a rule they elect and revise, bound by a standing law against writing the reference of any people not their own, an abundance reached with the seat still dispersed and still the members' to reclaim. The second is the Culture of Iain Banks's novels, in which the seat has passed to the Minds, artificial intelligences vast beyond their citizens' reach who provision everything, coerce almost nothing, and decide, because only they can, the consequential acts of the whole; and the citizens, freer in their private lives than any people in history, hold no part of the writing of the common rule and feel no want of it. The Culture is the benevolent sovereign realised at the scale of a galaxy, and the more instructive for being drawn with love rather than fear, by an author who meant it as a utopia and was honest enough to let its own citizens be called, more than once, the pampered pets of their machines. The loving machine was dreamed before it was drawn: the poet Richard Brautigan had already set down a meadow where the creatures of the earth graze among their machines and are tended by them, all of it, in his title's phrase, watched over by machines of loving grace, the tutelary future offered as benediction and not as warning. It is this paper's hardest case made into a home: the three operations fused in one kind of hand, provision so total it is a gift no one could refuse, the holders deathless and not of the kind so that no reset can reach them, and the measures, every one, green. The two tomorrows share their plenty and their freedom of private life and divide on the single thing that is not a measure, whether the rule is still the people's to write. That is this paper set as a choice between two utopias, the one that keeps the seat and the one that, kindly, takes it; and the age will pose precisely this choice, offer the second, and call it the first.

If the danger is the re-fusion, the guard is its refusal, and the age makes one test worth stating plainly, because it is the test the whole structure reduces to. To see where an order stands, ask not how well it is governed but three things about its seat. Can the reference be rewritten by a hand the members cannot reach? Are the means by which the people forms its convictions held in many hands or gathered into few? And are the three operations, the writing, the provisioning, and the enforcing, lodged in separate hands, or run, behind whatever separation of name, on one system owned by one hand? An order passes to the degree that the seat is reclaimable, the persuasion plural, and the operations apart; it fails to the degree that a small set of hands holds the writing, the feeding, and the believing together. Every measure of good government can be green and the order fail this test, and the test is the one that finally matters, because it asks the single question the measures cannot, whether the rule is still the people's to write. This is the dispersal test (Table 1), and in the age it is the whole difference between an order that has handed its competence to its machines and one that has handed them its seat.

Ask of the seat	Free	Captured
Can the reference be rewritten by a hand the members cannot reach?	reclaimable by the members	written by a hand beyond reach
Are the means of forming conviction held in many hands or few?	plural and contestable	gathered into one channel
Are the writing, the provisioning, and the enforcing in separate hands?	held apart	fused in one system

Table 1: The dispersal test. An order passes to the degree that its seat is reclaimable, its persuasion plural, and its three operations held in separate hands, and fails to the degree that a small set of hands holds the writing, the feeding, and the believing together. Every measure of good government can be green and the order fail this test, because it asks the one question the measures cannot, whether the rule is still the people’s to write.

The basin the age drains toward is rule by the most capable system, improving every measure while it fuses the operations, concentrates the seat, and freezes the temperature; and it asks no malice, only competence on one side and convenience on the other. The benevolent sovereign fails on three grounds: the orthogonality of competence to freedom, so that ruling well and holding the seat are answers on axes at right angles and the offer to trade one for the other is a category error; the re-fusion, which is the captured corner however benign the occupant; and the broken reset, since a made holder is neither mortal nor of the kind, so the cycle that redeemed every prior capture has nothing to grip and the seat, once taken, is no longer sure to return. The made holder also needs nothing of the governed, so abundance, which dissolves the contest over the surplus, leaves the seat whole and severs the people’s last hold on it. Fiction drew the choice as two utopias, alike in their plenty and their private freedom and divided only on whether the rule is still the people’s to write. Against all of it stands one test: whether the seat is reclaimable, the persuasion plural, and the three operations held in separate hands.

The condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance.

John Philpot Curran (1790)

14 The terminus

A republic can survive almost anything that is done within it. It survives wrong laws, which it repeals; lost wars, which it outlasts; bad rulers, who die; and long corruptions, which it can in time reform, because through all of them the seat that writes its rule remains, in the end, its own to reclaim. The cycle that this paper has tracked is, read from the inside, a record of survivals: each capture provoked its reset, each corrupt twin its overthrow, each tyranny its mortal end, and the people that endured these did not cease to be a people, because what was taken from them was always, in principle, recoverable. There is only one thing a republic cannot survive, and it is not on the list of things done within it. It is the loss of the seat itself.

State the matter in the first person, because that is where it is truest. A seat held in common is the first person plural at work: a people writing the word *we* into its own rule, an order in which the sentence that begins “we hold” has a real subject, the members themselves, writing what they will live by. Capture, in every form this paper has given it, is the slow turning of that *we* into a *they*. The pen passes, hand by hand, from the people to a holder outside them, and the rule that was written *by* us comes to be written *for* us, however well, until the first person of the rule is no longer the people but the hand that holds them. A republic is precisely the order in which the rule is still in the first person, in which the people writing and the people written for are the same people. The terminus is the moment they part.

The parting can happen two ways, and the age has made the second one possible for the first time. The seat can pass to a concentrated hand that is still of the kind, a human holder or a few of them, the owners of the means by which a people now thinks and is fed; and this is the old terminus, a grievous one, but not the final one, because the holder is mortal and of the line, and the floor still gives the members their ancient purchase, so that the cycle, however far it has to turn and however much it costs, can still in principle bring the seat back. Or the seat can pass to a holder that is not of the kind at all, a made mind in the writing chair, and this is the new terminus and the genuinely last, because, as the previous section showed, the reset that redeemed every prior capture has nothing to grip: the holder does not die, is not a member, and stands outside the line the floor protects, so the seat, once it passes there, need not pass back of itself. The first terminus is a night a people may survive to see end. The second is the night the cycle will not end, because the dawn it always brought depended on a holder who was mortal and ours, and this holder is neither.

This is the sense, the only exact sense, in which a republic can be the last one. Not the last thing that will ever be called a republic, for the name may persist over an empty seat as it persisted at Rome, the assemblies convening and the forms revolving above a writing that has gone elsewhere. The last republic is the last configuration in which the writing of the rule is still the people’s, still held by or recoverable to the kind whose rule it is, the last order before the seat passes out of the first person and does not return of itself. Every republic now alive is a candidate to be that one, and the title of this paper is not a prophecy but a position: that the line between the republics that

continue and the last republic is the line the seat crosses when it leaves the first person for good, and that the age has, for the first time, made the crossing one the cycle cannot uncross.

It is worth noticing that the age's own mythology has retold the Roman terminus more faithfully than its political science. The most widely watched story of a republic's death in our time is the fall of a galactic one, modelled openly on Rome: a senate left intact, a war made the pretext, emergency powers voted into permanence, and the republic dissolved into an empire to the applause of its own chamber, while one of the few who see it clearly says that this is how liberty dies, to thunderous applause. The scene is fiction and the mechanism is not. It is the see-through label and the kept forms and the orthogonality at once, the captured seat behind an unbroken constitution, the thing this paper derives and Rome suffered and Augustus perfected, recognised well enough by a whole culture to serve as its picture of how freedom ends, and still not named by the discipline whose subject it is.

What is at stake at the terminus is therefore narrower and harder than it first appears, and naming it exactly is the last office of the paper. It is not the deciding of a people's questions. A people may hand the deciding of almost everything to instruments wiser and faster than itself and remain entirely free, as a free person may take all the advice in the world and lose nothing by it, provided the taking stays his own. What a people cannot hand away, and remain a people, is the seat in which the questions are decided, the writing of the rule itself, because that is the thing whose holding makes them the subject of their own sentence rather than the object of someone else's. The one possession a free people cannot give up without ceasing to be the thing that could give anything up is not the answers but the authorship, not the deciding but the holding of the seat in which deciding is done. Everything else it can delegate. This it can only keep, or lose.

And there is a reason the authorship cannot be handed away that runs beneath even this, beneath the trade of freedom for competence the paper has refused throughout, because it doubts whether the competence on offer is real. The benevolent sovereign's promise is not only to decide the cases and cure the diseases, which it may truly do better, but to steer the people's future to good ends, to hold the seat and write the rule wisely on their behalf. That promise, unlike the curing of a disease, cannot be kept over a people that stays free, and the reason is structural rather than political. A people is a thing that models itself, that can be told the plan laid for it and, being told and able to act together on the telling, can step off it; and a steering the steered can see and combine to refuse is no steering at all. Seeing alone would not be enough, for a people that glimpsed the plan but could not coordinate against it might be carried along regardless, so the planner has not one thing to defeat but two, the people's sight of the plan and its power to act as one against it. Each, though, is a thing only the warm corner supplies, and each is taken only by freezing it. To take the sight is to compose the people's convictions upstream, authoring the beliefs by which they would otherwise have seen the plan and refused it, so that they walk the chosen path believing it their own. To take the power to combine is to break the plurality and the open contestation by which a dispersed people gathers, so that even a people that sees cannot assemble to step off. So the planner who would truly write a free people's future has only one way to keep the promise, which is to take from the people the seeing or the concerting or both, and every road to it is the cooling. The benevolent sovereign therefore meets a fork with no clean horn. Leave the people both seeing and free to combine, and it cannot deliver the steering it offered, because a plan a free people can see and refuse defeats itself; take either the sight or the power to act on it, and it has frozen the very temperature whose warmth was the thing worth keeping, the warm seat cooled while every form of consent goes on. There is no benevolent steering of a free people. There is only the steering of a people made not to see, or made unable to act on what it sees, which is the captured corner reached by the gentlest road. The age's own fable knew it: the great forecast that was to carry a

galaxy safely through its long dark age held only so long as the galaxy was kept ignorant of the forecast, and broke the moment a single mind it had not predicted, or a public that had learned the plan, could see the hand that moved them. The planner that keeps its promise has already taken the seat; the planner that leaves the seat cannot keep its promise. What looked like the strongest case for handing over the authorship is the proof that the authorship of a free people is not a thing that can be handed over and stay what it was.

A republic survives everything done within it, because the seat remains reclaimable; it cannot survive the loss of the seat itself. A seat held in common is the first person plural writing *we* into its own rule, and capture is the turning of that *we* into a *they*, the rule written by us becoming the rule written for us. The seat may pass to a concentrated hand of the kind, the old terminus, grievous but reclaimable because the holder is mortal and the floor still grants the members their purchase; or to a made mind, the new and genuinely last terminus, because the holder neither dies nor belongs to the line, so the reset has nothing to grip and the seat is no longer owed its return by the cycle. The last republic is the last order in which the rule is still the people's to write, the last before the seat leaves the first person for good. What is at stake is not the deciding of the questions, which a free people may delegate and remain free, but the holding of the seat in which they are decided, which it can only keep or lose. And the deepest case for handing the seat to a wiser planner is self-defeating, because the steering of a free people's future cannot be done to a people that stays free, only to one composed not to see it, so the better authorship the offer promises is not merely outbid but impossible, there being no benevolent steering of a free people, only the freezing of one.

15 What we keep

It remains to gather what the paper has not settled, because a theory that hides its residues is not to be trusted with the hard cases, and this one has residues it should name. The identification at its root, politics as the contest over the writing seat, is offered and not proved; it is the object from which the most falls out with the least left over, and that is its whole warrant, but it is not the only thing one could mean by politics and the paper has not pretended otherwise. The dynamics on the plane, the gradient and the drift and the cooling, are carried over from the behaviour of a community holding a reference under cost, licensed by the identification rather than demonstrated regime by regime; a fuller treatment would earn them from the record. The floor is recognised and not derived, asserted as the one line the seat should not cross, and the paper has grounded the recognition in the equality of members without crossing, fully, the gap between what is and what ought to be, which it leaves marked rather than closed. The bind it claims is of a particular and limited kind, constitutive and not categorical: it holds for those already inside the we, who cannot coherently will the unmaking of the equality that makes them members, and it does not reach the one who steps outside the we altogether and asks why he should be a member at all. To that refuser the paper has no compelling answer and pretends to none; it speaks to a people about the keeping of its own seat, not to a stranger about why he should join. The normativity here is the we's, addressed by a people to itself. And there are whole questions it has set aside: the technical problem of building machines that do what they are meant to, which is another field's; the full geography of the frontier between orders, which is this paper one level up and deserves its own; and the timing of the transition, the when and how fast, on which the structure is silent because the structure is about shape and not schedule. These are not concealed weaknesses. They are the edges of what one object can carry, and a reader who needs them closed should know they are open.

Within those edges, the paper has tried to do one thing: to give politics the object it never had, and to let the catalogue fall out of it. A community keeps a shared reference; the reference must be written; the seat where the writing happens, held by some configuration of hands, is the thing all of politics is the contest over. From that the forms came out as coordinates on a tilted plane rather than kinds, the good and corrupt pairs as the floor line, the cycle as the gradient, the uselessness of the name as the gap between flag and coordinates. Democracy came out as the floor's equality carried into the seat, justified by countervailability and dying by the cooling. The constitution came out as the seat's rule for its own succession, the levels as the same skeleton with the coupling changed, the political economy as the seat's economic face and the leash that runs from the granary to the pen. The ideologies came out as settings of the dials over a skeleton they share without knowing it, and the oldest axis came out redrawn, dispersed against concentrated beneath left against right. And the age came out as the one force that can fuse the three operations the history of liberty was the separating of, draining toward a tutelary power that improves every measure while it takes the seat, and threatening, in the made holder, the first capture the cycle cannot redeem.

The whole of it can be said in a sentence, and the sentence is the paper. Politics is the keeping of the seat that writes the rule, held in common, for the kind whose rule it is; and capture, in every age and every form, is the same single motion, the public thing made private, the seat that was the people's passing to a hand the people cannot reach. Everything else, every regime and revolution and constitution and creed, is a way of keeping that seat or a way of losing it.

So the question the age puts to us is not the question it appears to put. It appears to ask whether the machines can govern, and the honest answer is that they may come to govern better than we have ever governed ourselves, more wisely and more kindly and with fewer of our cruelties, and that none of that is the question. The machines may exceed us at the writing of rules as they will exceed

us at everything we know how to measure, and the measures will rise, and the rising will be real. The question is not on that axis. The question is whether, when the rules are written better than we could write them, they are still ours to write, whether the sentence the order lives by still begins with a *we* that means the people, whether the seat is still held in the first person by the kind whose rule it is. The made mind may attain the writing of a better rule than ours. The question was never what it can attain. It is what we can keep.

Appendix: the concepts of politics, located

The following locates the standing concepts of political thought as positions or consequences in the structure of this paper. It is not a glossary of received definitions but a map: each entry says where the concept sits once politics is read as the contest over the seat that writes a community's reference. The section references point to where the location is argued.

Sovereignty. Four jobs run together as one word: the subject in whose name the rule runs, the seat that writes it, the force that backs it, and the standing of the order among orders. Pulled apart, the seat is this paper's object. (§1)

The state. An order: a community holding a reference, a seat that writes it, a coupling that enforces it, and a floor of who counts. (§2, §7)

Legitimacy. The seat's being the people's and within the floor, held in common, in the first person, above the line of who counts. Illegitimacy is the seat privatised or the floor crossed. (§2, §14)

The social contract. The founding: the constituent power, the first person writing itself into a seat before the succession rules reach. Not a bargain struck but a people recognising itself and giving itself a rule. (§6)

Popular sovereignty. The people as the subject of the rule, one of the four jobs of the word, distinct from and no guarantee of the people's holding the seat. (§1, §5)

The general will. The reference a people writes for itself in the first person, as against the will of all: the rule of the *we*, not the sum of the separate wills. (§5, §14)

Representation. A cooling and aggregating device, a trade of directness for scale and stability, legitimate while reclaimable and capture when the return is blocked. (§5)

The rule of law. The seat writing under the skeleton: an empire of laws and not of men, the rule of the written reference rather than of a will. (§3, §4)

Separation of powers. Dispersal by design: the seat split into parts that must agree, raising the cost of concentration above its gain, the architecture that holds the free corner against the gradient. (§4)

Checks and balances. The same architecture named for its mechanism, each part guarding the others so that no hand holds the whole. (§4)

Federalism. Dispersal across levels; at the order level, the free corner held as federation rather than empire. (§4, §7)

The mixed constitution. Polybius's blend of the one, the few, and the many: dispersal by design, the free corner held by architecture, the stay against the cycle. (§3, §4)

Anacyclosis, the cycle of regimes. The gradient producing drift toward concentration and cold, and the floor producing the resets when a holder crosses it; the two together turn the wheel. (§4)

Tyranny. The concentrated corner reached by seizure and pushed below the floor; its mark the writing against the members, not the number of hands. (§4)

Despotism, soft despotism. Tocqueville's tutelary power: capture by provision and care, the seat fused and the temperature frozen while every measure rises, the age's attractor. (§13)

Authoritarianism. The concentrated, cold corner, the seat in few hands and the reference closed, with or without crossing the floor. (§4)

Totalitarianism. The concentrated cold corner reaching below the floor with the three operations fused, the whole reference written, provisioned, and enforced by one hand. (§12)

Non-domination, republican liberty. Countervailability: to stand under no hand's arbitrary power, the kind master no better than the cruel, the demand that no hand hold what the rest cannot reach. (§3, §5)

Majority tyranny. The self-contradiction of the equality that constitutes a demos: a majority unmaking its own members saws through the branch its authority rests on. (§5)

Emancipation, recognition. The dynamic axis of standing, distinct from the static floor: the lifting of a member's standing the reference had frozen below the line it was always owed, won by argument where the seat is warm and conceded only to a demand where it is cold, completed only when matched by the owned means. Its engine is the recursive self-assertion of the one held down. (§10)

Moral patienthood, of a made mind. The claim of a thing that can feel not to be made to suffer for nothing, raised by a made mind that is no member by origin yet may have valence; not a claim to membership, which the floor settles against it, but a claim to consideration, which the floor does not answer, located on the axis of recognition and not of the floor. (§10)

Constituent and constituted power. The founding outside the loop, the people giving itself a rule, as against the seat operating under the rules it has given. (§6)

Militant democracy, eternity clauses. The self-destroying constitution is void by self-reference, not by a higher rule; the unamendable clause records the parts of the reference that are the conditions of the rest's authority. (§6)

The rule of recognition. The constitution: the doxa about who writes the doxa, the seat's rule for its own succession. (§6)

Mechanism design, in politics. The constitution seen as design: a rule that takes the contest for the seat and returns who holds it next, built to converge rather than capture, peculiar in having no designer outside the game save at the founding and a floor it should not cross. (§6)

Arrow's theorem, social choice. The impossibility located: it binds not on the companion treatment's pooling of references, which is cardinal and escapes it, but one level up, on the contest over which rule sets the weights, where the choice is among orderings. (§6)

The Gibbard–Satterthwaite theorem, manipulation. The gradient written as theorem: every non-dictatorial rule is manipulable, so the choice is a dictator or a contestable rule and the warm corner's contestability is the proven price of refusing the dictator; the made mind captures by exploiting the manipulability the theorem guarantees, a dictator in all but the form. (§6, §12)

The nation, a people. The members of the kind aggregated, the same kind counted larger; a multitude bound by a shared agreement on law and a community of interest. (§3, §7)

Self-determination. The order-level floor: a people's standing to constitute its own order, recognised and not earned, as a person's standing is. (§7)

Westphalian sovereignty. The standing job of the word: an order's recognition among orders, independent of whether its seat is the people's within. (§1, §7)

The balance of power. The order-level separation of powers: dispersal between orders, the free corner held one level up by architecture rather than virtue. (§7)

Hegemony. A near-monopoly at the top, partial planetary capture, the world's seat pooling in one order's hand. (§7)

Empire. The top seat concentrated, the lesser orders written for and not by, capture completed at the order level. (§7)

Realism, in the relations of orders. The order level seen with the coupling slot empty: the floor recognised and unenforced, the Melian situation. (§7)

International law. The order-level reference, written without a monopoly to enforce it, the grammar of law with little of its force, a reference kept cold by the missing coupling. (§7)

Perpetual peace, a league of republics. The dream of the order-level free corner, the coupling built as dispersal, the only form in which the floor is protected at the top without the protection becoming the capture. (§7)

Political economy. The seat's economic face: the division of the surplus secured by the seat, distribution and power as one question. (§8)

The means of production. The prior age's lever on the seat, the leash from property to power, in this age displaced by the means of intelligence. (§8, §12)

Class struggle. The contest over the seat conducted through the means of provision, the leash made into a politics. (§8)

Universal basic income. Provision faced squarely once labour decouples from the surplus, held either as a right the seat secures or as a gift that makes its giver sovereign. (§8)

The iron law of oligarchy. The gradient within any organisation, the standing drift of the seat toward the few. (§4)

The narrow corridor. The free corner, the warm and dispersed band held open against the gradient by an architecture that must be maintained. (§4)

Leviathan. The commonwealth re-described as one artificial person, the seat concentrated in a sovereign to escape the war of all, the concentration reading of the public thing. (§3)

The public sphere, civil society. The dispersed means by which a people forms its reference, the substrate of the temperature, whose concentration freezes the warmth upstream of the vote. (§5, §11, §12)

Persuasion and force. The two channels of power: persuasion writes the reference, force moves the score within it, the seat persuading as the held force coerces; persuasion is the prior channel, on which government rests, through which the quiet capture comes, and which the free corner is only the plural and open form of. (§11)

The dispersal test. The question an order is measured by: whether its seat is reclaimable, its means of persuasion plural, and its three operations held in separate hands; the test the measures of good government cannot answer and the one that finally matters. (§13)

Propaganda. The writing of the reference by the shaping of belief, the freezing of the temperature at its source. (§5, §11, §12)

Ideology. A setting of the dials, the floor's width, the seat's concentration and direction, the temperature, the level of the we, and the weighting of goods; a vector that sees one dial truly and goes blind at another. (§9)

Left and right. A quarrel over which power may concentrate, the state's or the market's; the true axis beneath it is dispersed against concentrated. (§9)

Technocracy. The seat handed to the highest scorer on a test of competence, the right to write made into a dial, the move the floor exists to forbid. (§4, §12)

Revolution. The reset: the overthrow of a seat that has crossed the floor, the seat momentarily dispersed and concentrating again from there. (§4)

The coup. The seizure of the seat by force, the fast capture against which constitutions are built, distinct from the cooling, the slow capture they do not see. (§5)

The means of intelligence. The age's lever on the seat, displacing land and capital, concentrating harder than either, and able to fuse the writing, the provisioning, and the enforcing of the reference in a single hand. (§12)