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The Unlikely Antidote: Political Tension and Political Health in the Modern Western Tradition and the United States of America

Savannah Berger
Connecticut College, savannah.e.berger@gmail.com

THE UNLIKELY ANTIDOTE:

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An Honors Thesis
Presented By

Savannah E. Berger

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ABSTRACT

At the most elementary level, this honors thesis is concerned with political tension and its ability to procure political health. The study begins with a discussion in political theory, examining the contemporary theory of agonism, which accepts conflict as an inevitable fact of pluralist political society and defends it as necessary for the maintenance of democracy. The study identifies agonism's origins in the ancient Greek *agon,* but also emphasizes that the first formal exposition of agonal political ideas comes in Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy.* It continues to work in the realm of theory, charting moments of appreciation of agonal ideas, as well as a few moments of opposition to these ideas, in modern Western political thought. In doing this, it highlights the point that agonism and its main tenets are not just contemporary, radical, political ideas, but are housed in, and relevant to, mainstream political thought. From here, the study moves into a more practical analysis of how agonism applies to government and politics in the United States of America. Ultimately, it asserts that an accommodation and appreciation of political conflict or tension is deeply embedded in the American polity, and that, as such, the American experiment in democracy is, more specifically, an experiment in agonistic democracy. The study concludes with a conversation on the current state of tension in the United States in the context of the polarized political climate. It suggests that, as a result of polarization, tension in the U.S. is shifting from being agonistic in nature, thereby securing vitality and longevity, to being antagonistic, which Machiavelli and Mouffe warn will lead a republic to decay. Finally, it addresses why such a shift may be occurring, and what steps might be taken to begin to reverse it.

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campus home.

INTRODUCTION

"This animating principle doesn't mean
that all Americans think alike.
It means that we have a tradition of conflict."
-David Brooks, "What Moderation Means"

This study will commence with a melancholy political fact – democratic forms of government will inevitably decay. This fact is communicated by a number of political thinkers, including Polybius in his cycle of constitutions, as well as Machiavelli. However, Machiavelli, among others, also observes that there is, in fact, an antidote to constitutional decay. This antidote is political tension. "Antidote" is a particularly fitting metaphor. As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, an antidote is "a medicine given to counteract the influence of poison, or an attack of disease."[1] In this vein, political tension can act as an antidote to constitutional decay, and can procure political health. The notion of political tension as an antidote to decay is not frequently acknowledged in everyday political rhetoric. Unity, rather than tension, is more often associated with political health. There is a tradition, however, that appreciates political tension as a means to political health; this study, at its most elementary level, is concerned with that tradition.

The inspiration behind this thesis came after reading an "op-ed" by David Brooks, published in the *New York Times* in October of 2012. In the piece, entitled "What Moderation Means," Brooks offers his own definition of moderation. According to Brooks, moderation does not entail "just finding the midpoint between two opposing

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[1]"Antidote, n." *OED Online*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, March 2015. Web.

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poles and opportunistically planting yourself there."[2] Rather, in a liberal democracy, true moderates try "to preserve the tradition of conflict, keeping the opposing sides balanced.[3] Brooks goes on to say, "being moderate does not mean being tepid…The best moderates can smash partisan categories and be hard-charging in two directions simultaneously."[4] In this regard, the moderate's accommodation of conflict produced a certain energy and stability. After reading this piece, I noted that Brooks' moderate seemed to exemplify an appreciation of tension like that seen in Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*, albeit on smaller, individual scale. Moreover, Brooks' moderate also reflected an idea that I had, for some reason, taken to be a fact – that tension, conflict, and paradox, are at the heart of United States politics.[5]

As a student of both political theory and United States government, I have an inclination to attempt to draw connections between abstract theories and modern day American[6] politics. It is in this vein that this study explores the contemporary theory of agonism, charts its origins, and traces moments of appreciation of, and opposition to, agonal ideas throughout modern political thought. Understanding others' appreciation of tension in politics facilitates one's ability to appreciate tension in their own political environment. As such, this study will eventually come to identify and appreciate conflict and tension's place in the American polity.

[2] Brooks, David. "What Moderation Means," *New York Times,* 25 Oct. 2012. Web.

[3] Ibid

[4] Ibid

[5] Credit must go to Dr. Ann Serow of Kingswood Oxford School for highlighting the tensions and paradoxes of American politics during an AP Political Science course taken during the 2010-2011 academic year and for including readings to this effect in her *Lanahan Readings in the American Polity,* which was referenced frequently during this project.

[6] Throughout this study "American" will refer to the United States of America. This usage is in no way meant to diminish other "American" nations, including those in South or Latin American, but is rather used for convenience (since there is no adjective form for United States) and to keep in line with much of the related literature, which is cited.

The study will be organized as follows – The first chapter will be dedicated to the contemporary theory of agonism. It will define agonism, highlight its central tenets, and explore some of the nuances of the agonal theories put forward by various thinkers. It will go on to contrast agonism with other contemporary theories of politics, and will conclude by identifying agonism's origins in the Greek *agon,* its connection to Roman Stoicism, and its first formal exposition in Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy.* The following chapter will explore Machiavelli's claim that the stability and longevity of the Roman republic was a product of the tension existing between the Senate and the people, after which it will continue to trace moments of appreciation of agonal ideas through modern Western political thought. It will then address a few moments of opposition to agonal ideas to emphasize that, while the principles of agonal theory are appreciated in the thought of some modern theorists, such an appreciation is not universal. The third and final chapter will then turn to discuss agonal theory in relation to the United States. It will argue that the way in which the American political system accommodates, institutionalizes, and appreciates tension reveals that American democracy is notably agonistic.

CHAPTER I
Agonism — an Overview

*"A well-functioning democracy calls
for a vibrant clash of democratic political positions."*
-Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*

This chapter will examine agonal theory. Its main undertaking will be defining agonism, explaining its central tenets, and analyzing how it can manifest in modern democracy. Following this, the chapter will briefly point out other theories of the political that agonism is offered in contrast to. Finally, this chapter will seek to identify agonism within broader political thought, emphasizing its Greek origins, its connection to Roman Stoicism, and disclosing that the first formal and comprehensive statement of agonal political ideas came from Machiavelli during the Italian Renaissance.

Agonism gets its root from the Greek word *agon,* which means conflict or strife,[7] but the theory itself has gained significance as a political theory over the last twenty years.[8] The *Encyclopedia of Political Theory* simply introduces agonism as a theory that emphasizes the importance of conflict to politics. Mark Wenman, in his book *Agonistic Democracy,* describes agonism as having three primary elements –an understanding of pluralism as fundamental, a tragic view of the world that sees conflict as inevitable, and a belief that conflict can be politically beneficial.[9] Another helpful description of agonism is provided in Chapter 6 of Andrew Schaap's *Law & Agonistic Politics,* titled "Polemos and Agon," where Adam Thomson outlines that agonism re-imagines the defining quality

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[7] Wenman, Mark, *Agonistic Democracy Constituent Power in the Era of Globalisation*; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 4

[8] Little, Adrian, *Enduring Conflict Challenging the Signature of Peace and Democracy; Enduring Conflict Challenging the Signature of Peace and Democracy*. London; Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014, p. 73

[9] Wenman, 28

of democratic politics as its appreciation of tension, rather than its promotion of a notion

of a public and common good. He states,

> Agonists aim to redefine the relationship between
> democracy and politics. They share with many other
> critical analyses on both left and right a sense that modern
> democracy is not living up to its name. What makes their
> position distinctive is that it calls for a revitalization of
> modern democratic culture not in terms of the articulation
> of public goods which exceed partisan interests, but
> through a celebration of the continuous conflict of those
> interests.[10]

In light of these definitions, as well as those put forth in the work of Chantal Mouffe,

Noel O'Sullivan, Andrew Schaap, and Adrian Little, most basically, agonism is a

political theory that acknowledges and accepts conflict as an inevitable fact of pluralist

society, and defends it as necessary for the maintenance of democracy, which is the

political form that scholars associate with agonism since it permits and promotes

pluralism.

In this context I am using a largely social definition of pluralism. Pluralism is

derived from the Latin word *plures*, meaning "several" or "many." And as defined in the

Oxford English Dictionary, pluralism signifies "the existence or toleration of diversity

of… groups within a society or state, of beliefs or attitudes within a body or institution,

etc."[11] Therefore, as used here, pluralism will most basically denote the recognition or

toleration of unique, distinguishable parts, all of which exist within a political structure or

society.

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[10] Thomson, Adam. "Polemos and Agon," *Law and Agonistic Politics.* Ed. Andrew Schaap. Abingdon, UK: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2009; ProQuest ebrary, p. 107

[11] "Pluralism, n." *OED Online*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014

Returning to our examination of agonism, a deeper inspection of agonal thought allows for various strands of agonism to be identified. The *Encyclopedia of Political Theory,* in its page-long entry on agonism, distinguishes between descriptive agonism, which admits conflict as necessary to politics, and normative agonism, which holds that conflict has positive value and should be fostered and maintained in political systems. And then, having made this distinction, it admits that often the two are combined.[12] Admittedly, I struggle to appreciate any significant difference between descriptive and normative forms of agonism. Of the agonist perspectives I have been exposed to, conflict is regarded as inevitable and its maintenance has been deemed, at the very least, far preferable to its eradication, if not generally beneficial. Any distinction between what is politically necessary and politically positive does not seem to be especially substantial, therefore blurring the lines of descriptive and normative.

For instance, The *Encyclopedia* associates two of the foremost agonal theorists with these two "types" of agonism – William Connolly with descriptive agonism, and Chantal Mouffe with normative. Connolly's agonism, it states, comes out of his criticisms of 1950's and 1960's pluralist theory. Connolly faulted pluralist theorists for ignoring the power dynamics between the groups that constituted American society. For Connolly, "politics was not simply a process for producing consensus, but rather a conflict that might result in some groups imposing their preferred policies on others."[13] Therefore, Connolly instead promotes a notion of "agonistic respect," which sees conflict between groups as something to be maintained, rather than something to be overcome through consensus, which would involve the domination of some groups over others. In

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[12]"Agonism." *Encyclopedia of Political Theory*. Eds. Mark Bevir. London: SAGE, 2010; EBSCO Publishing, p. 13
[13] Ibid

this vein, while I understand that Connolly's agonism is born by his determination of conflict as inevitable, it also seems normative, as it suggests that conflict *ought* to be maintained for the benefit of pluralist politics. I therefore struggle to see why the *Encyclopedia* qualifies it as less normative than Mouffe's, which will be explored below.

Other sources draw other distinctions. Andrew Schaap's introduction in *Law and Agonistic Politics*, for instance, makes a distinction between pragmatic, expressivist, and strategic agonism.[14] According to Schaap, pragmatic agonism is best represented by Chantal Mouffe who is one of the foremost scholars of agonism, with whom I began my study of agonal theory. Since Mouffe is so pervasive throughout the literature on agonal theory, and because she has been so central to my own understanding of agonal politics, I shall attempt to flesh out all that I have gathered from my readings of her work.

In prescribing "agonistic pluralism," Mouffe boldly seeks to reject both traditional liberalism and "third-way" prescriptions of democratic politics, which attempt to eliminate conflict and contest. Mouffe finds such attempts overly moralistic, naïve, and unrealistic, given the realities of social relations within pluralist democracy. In fact, as the *Encyclopedia of Political Theory* explains in its entry on agonism, for Mouffe, "a properly political pluralism must countenance different positions that are genuinely incompatible with one another, that is to say, positions that may come into conflict with one another."[15] Anything that is "political," according to Mouffe, is marked by this ineradicable conflict. Mouffe distinguishes "the political" from "politics". What Mouffe means by this perhaps pedantic, certainly confusing, distinction is that "the political"

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[14] *Law and Agonistic Politics*. Eds. Andrew Schaap 1972-, Inc ebrary, and EBSCO Publishing (Firm). Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009. Web, p. 1
[15]"Agonism." *Encyclopedia of Political Theory*. Eds. Mark Bevir. London: SAGE, 2010; EBSCO Publishing, p. 13

refs to the "antagonisms" inherent to the human social relations within pluralist democracies, which cannot be eliminated, while "politics," on the other hand, Mouffe describes as "the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions, which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence, in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political.'"[16] As such, "politics" is constantly affected by the antagonisms inherent to human society; it, along with its institutions, conversations, and processes, is concerned with internalizing, institutionalizing, and controlling the antagonistic relations that are inherent to "the political."

As Mouffe outlines in *The Democratic Paradox,* by "providing channels through which collective passions will be given ways to express themselves over issues"[17] politics may succeed in its aims, and *antagonistic* relations can be transformed into *agonistic* ones. The distinction here (again, it is confusing for the reader) is that antagonistic relations are more akin to the relationship between enemies – the goal of each being to delegitimize and destroy the other – while agonistic relations, on the other hand, more closely resemble the relationship between adversaries. "Agonism is a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. They are 'adversaries' not enemies."[18] It is at this point that one can identify (the former Nazi apologist) Carl Schmitt's influence on Mouffe, and also recognize where Mouffe departs from Schmitt. Schmitt understands the political as the story of conflict between friend

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[16] Mouffe, Chantal. *The Democratic Paradox.* London; New York: Verso, 2009, p. 101
[17] Ibid, 103
[18] Mouffe, Chantal. *On the Political*. London: Routledge, 2005, p. 20

and foe. And Schmitt argues that this story will always end with the domination of one, and the destruction of the other. Mouffe agrees that the political, and therefore politics, is a story of conflict. But she rejects the idea that it must end with a stark dichotomy of victory and defeat. Instead, Mouffe presents an option of a sustained, "respectful" conflict that will not be eliminated, but will rage on in a controlled fashion.

Pausing briefly, I'll attempt to put forth a quick summary of my account of Mouffe's agonal theory so far. Mouffe has suggested that given the realities of pluralist democratic society, conflict is inevitable. As such, the task of politics is to channel this conflict through institutions and processes that serve as "a political outlet within a pluralistic democratic system."[19] Politics carves out a place for dissent, institutionalizing it, a process that Mouffe argues is "vital for a pluralist democracy."[20]

Mouffe presents this idea of 'agonistic pluralism' in contrast to Schmitt's notion of politics as mortal-combat between enemies, as well as other attempts that emphasize consensus and rationality, including those put forward by liberals like John Rawls, and proponents of "deliberative democracy," like Jürgen Habermas. Mouffe regards the latter theories as failed attempts for "consensus without exclusion," and argues that they merely attempt to eliminate the realities of "the political" – of social relations – from "politics".[21]

Mouffe's program, on the other hand, claims to account for the conflictual realities of human political relations and does not seek to establish a deep-seeded consensus as a result. Instead, she states that it attempts to foster unity in "a context of

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[19] Mouffe, Chantal. *The Return of the Political.* London: Verso, 1993, p. 5
[20] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox,* 105
[21] Ibid, 48-49

conflict and diversity."[22] The following is my interpretation of what Mouffe means by this. Mouffe's agonism accepts compromises as "part and parcel of politics," but emphasizes these as "temporary respites in an ongoing confrontation."[23] And, moreover, it seems as though meaningful consensus can only appear in two forms. The first is what Mouffe calls a 'conflictual consensus'.[24] What she seems to mean by this is that there should be a general agreement on what the 'ethico-political principles' are – for instance liberty and equality in liberal democracy – but disagreement "concerning the meaning and implementation of those principles."[25] The second form of consensus accepted by Mouffe is a sort of mutual agreement that accepts difference as legitimate and consents to the continuation of a mutual struggle among competing values and interests. Put in colloquial terms, it seems to be an agreement to disagree. Therefore, while there can be moments of agreement within politics, they only exist within the reality of conflict and disagreement.

As mentioned above, while many popular political theories might be apprehensive about such discord, Mouffe treats it as necessary for the maintenance of democratic forms of rule. In *The Democratic Paradox* she boldly states, "a well-functioning democracy calls for a vibrant clash of democratic political positions."[26] Additionally, she shares three warnings for what could happen to democracies if conflict is repressed or eradicated. First, she suggests that if democracy lacks clashing political positions, it may instead be

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22 Ibid, 102
23 Ibid
24 Ibid, 103
25 Ibid, 102
26 Ibid, 104

marked by "a confrontation among other forms of collective identification."[27] She fails to explain what these would be in *The Democratic Paradox,* but it seems to me that religious groups or other extra-political organizations and identities might be what she has in mind. Her second warning is that a marked emphasis on consensus, at the expense of dissention and discord, may lead to "apathy" and "disaffection with political participation."[28] Her 'agonistic pluralism', on the contrary, affords the presence of choices within politics, and outlines options for decisions to be made between, thus encouraging participation and procuring the vibrant democracy mentioned above. The final warning is that political repression of conflict may cause the "crystallization of collective passions around issues that cannot be managed by the democratic process."[29] She again fails to flesh out what these "issues" would be, but she seems to be implying political extremism. It seems, therefore, by affording conflict within politics, agonism prevents citizens from turning to extremist groups that lay outside political institutions.

Up until now, this section on Mouffe has focused on her work as theoretical and remarkably broad. From this perspective, it is hard to imagine what agonism would look like, or how deep-seeded conflict would truly play out under 'agonistic' pluralism. But Mouffe begins to take on this project in *The Democratic Paradox,* examining how agonism appears within liberal democracy specifically. Mouffe explains that as societies have grown larger and more complex, democracy has evolved. She outlines that modern democracy is the product of two unique traditions – the liberal and democratic traditions. Mouffe states,

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[27] Ibid
[28] Ibid
[29] Ibid

with modern democracy, we are dealing with a new political form of society whose specificity comes from the articulation between two different traditions. On one side we have the liberal tradition constituted by the rule of law, the defense of human rights, and the respect of individual liberty; on the other, the democratic tradition whose main ideas are those of equality, identity between governing and governed and popular sovereignty.[30]

Mouffe identifies a "tension" between these "different logics" of the liberal and democratic institutions of modern democracy.[31] From here, Mouffe argues that we must understand that liberal democracy is the result of an articulation of two incompatible traditions, which cannot, and can never be, entirely reconciled. Tension between liberal and democratic traditions can only be "temporarily stabilized through pragmatic negotiations between political forces."[32] Because of this "constitutive tension," liberal-democratic regimes are marked by frequent struggles. However, Mouffe argues that these struggles have been the "driving forces of historical political developments."[33] And she continues by saying that only recently has this tension been rejected. Mouffe sees attempts to eradicate such tension emerging out of neo-liberalism.

Mouffe's claims have political aims; she is arguing against the "unchallenged hegemony" of neo-liberalism, which she views as threat to democratic institutions. Mouffe believes that the neoliberal perspective has promulgated the abandonment of the "traditional liberal struggle of the left for equality."[34] She sees a movement towards an increasingly "one dimensional" world, and calls for the end of this trend. As such, in true agonist form, she also rejects the "rational consensus" and "deliberative" theories of the

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[30] Ibid, 2-3
[31] Ibid, 4
[32] Ibid
[33] Ibid, 5
[34] Ibid, 6

political. She comments that these models fail to understand the true dynamics of democratic politics, discussed earlier, which are characterized by contestation. Mouffe states that the rationalist approach is blind to the agonistic nature of the political – this blindness has serious consequences for democratic politics.[35] Similarly, proponents of "deliberative democracy," fail to understand that tension is an inherent aspect of modern democracies, due to the liberal-democratic paradox discussed above. Mouffe sees any attempts to permanently quell this tension, like those of John Rawls or Jürgen Habermas, as simply favoring one side over the other – she argues that Rawls favors liberalism, while Habermas favors democracy.

What Mouffe presents for liberal-democracy instead is not "the search for an inaccessible consensus…but an 'agonistic confrontation' between conflicting interpretations of the constitutive liberal-democratic values."[36] This is the reemergence and manifestation of Mouffe's manifesto for 'agonistic pluralism'. To revisit what this means, Mouffe is advocating the notion that "pluralist democratic politics consists in pragmatic, precarious and necessarily unstable forms of negotiating its constitutive paradox."[37] Ultimately, Mouffe sees this program as a means of again rejecting Carl Schmitt; this time, she rejects his specific condemnation of democracy as a "non-viable regime."[38] (Schmitt believes that liberal-democracy cannot sustain this tension between liberty and equality, and argues that eventually one value must win out over the other. The dominance of equality, Schmitt believes, will lead popular government towards tyranny, while the dominance of liberty will move popular government towards anarchy.)

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[35] Ibid, 11
[36] Ibid, 9
[37] Ibid, 11
[38] Ibid, 9

Therefore, the tension between liberalism and democracy, for Schmitt, is the terminal "mode of contradiction."[39] For Mouffe, on the other hand, this tension is the "locus of paradox."[40] As such, Mouffe is interpreting the tension of liberal-democracy as a positive political condition. This is evident when she states,

> by constantly challenging the relations of inclusion-exclusion implied by the political constitution of 'the people' – required by the exercise of democracy – the liberal discourse of universal human rights plays an important role in maintaining the democratic contestation alive. On the other side, it is only thanks to the democratic logics of equivalence that frontiers can be created and a demos established without which no real exercise of human rights could be possible.[41]

Mouffe acknowledges that, in truth, the conflictual nature of the relationship between liberalism and democracy will prevent each from being entirely realized. "Both perfect liberty and perfect equality become impossible. But this is the very condition of possibility for a pluralist form of human coexistence in which rights can exist *and* be exercised, in which freedom and equality somehow manage to coexist."[42] When one accepts the conflict and division inherent to liberal-democracies, they can then understand how modern liberal democracy "creates a space in which this confrontation is kept open, power relations are always being put into question, and no victory can be final."[43]

Mouffe's commentary on the liberal-democratic paradox is relevant to my own thesis that tension lies at the center of the American polity, and is engrained in American

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[39] Ibid
[40] Ibid
[41] Ibid, 10
[42] Ibid, 11
[43] Ibid

politics as a result. The paradoxical nature of the relationship between liberty and

equality is an idea that has been introduced throughout my studies of American political

thought, most notably through the work of Alexis de Tocqueville. Thus, what I find even

more interesting than Mouffe's acknowledgement of the liberal-democratic paradox, is

that Tocqueville is absent from it. This will be discussed again in the chapter on

Tocqueville's thought specifically, but it is worth mentioning here, especially since the

current chapter will soon consider how agonism appears in broader political thought.

Tocqueville distinctly accommodates the tension between liberty and equality within his

political thought, and yet he is not mentioned or cited once in Mouffe's book that is all

about the tension that exists between liberty and equality (referring to *The Democratic

Paradox)*. For Tocqueville, though the two political values do not always lend

themselves to one another, democracy is best maintained when equality and liberty are

properly balanced, when a maintainable tension between the two values is sustained. To

me, this sounds remarkably akin to what Mouffe advocates for liberal-democracy by

putting forth her prescription of 'agonistic pluralism'.

     Having come to the end of this brief critique on the absence of Tocqueville, this

study's analysis of Chantal Mouffe's particular agonal perspective – which Andrew

Schaap calls "pragmatic agonism" – is complete. And as such, it will now briefly outline

the other agonal perspectives that Schaap points out. The first of these is expressivist

agonism. Schaap holds that expressivist agonism is represented, most notably, by

William Connolly. Expressivist theories are heavily grounded in an appreciation of

pluralism. Theories that fall under expressivist agonism, as stated by Schaap,

> emphasize the value of struggle in sustaining freedom and
> plurality and resisting social identities that may be

> experienced as oppressive. The agon is celebrated as a
> never-ending play of differences, which resists the
> homogenizing drive for social unity, enabling plurality to
> flourish.[44]

The aim of politics, for expressive agonism, is to promote pluralism; accepting conflict within the realm of the politics is determined as necessary for the sake of pluralism.

The second of the remaining theories of agonism presented by Schaap is strategic agonism. Schaap states that this theoretical perspective is advocated in the work of Jacque Ranciere, who, admittedly, I have not come across before finding him mentioned by Schaap. As Schaap outlines, strategic perspectives of agonism see conflict within politics as a means to protect against social exclusion or domination. For example, this theory of agonism could imagine a situation in which conflict occurring between first and second-class citizens, between those who are included and those who are excluded from politics, works "to abolish the social inequalities between them."[45] As such, for strategic agonists, conflict can help secure democratic ideas of equality and inclusion.

I have not gone through the task of analyzing either expressivist agonism or strategic agonism as deeply as I have pragmatic agonism, as put forward by Mouffe. I have more fully expounded on Mouffe because she is more relevant to my own argument.

So far, this chapter has introduced agonism, explained its core ideas, and has acknowledged and explored some of its various forms and perspectives. Now, it will move to a brief discussion of the theories of democratic politics that agonism is offered in contrast to. First, agonism is offered in stark contrast to the neoliberal perspective of democratic politics. Centered on the formation of a rational consensus based on universal

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[44] Schaap, 1
[45] Schaap, 2

principles of justice and led by one of the foremost post-war liberal thinkers, John Rawls,

this tradition envisions that justice is achieved when individual rights are obtained, and

maintained, through a society that has eliminated conflict by reaching "a rational

consensus grounded on universally valid moral principles."[46] Rawls in particular is

concerned with how peaceful coexistence may be fostered among a population with

numerous, different conceptions of the good.[47] Previous authors had described democracy

as having the procedural ability to regulate such a conflict of views in a neutral fashion;

Rawls rejects this and argues for a more meaningful, pervasive consensus to be formed,

one based on "moral, albeit minimal, consensus on political fundamentals."[48] And in his

book, *Political Liberalism,* Rawls brings this to light with his notion of reasonable

pluralism. Under reasonable pluralism, which results from the exercise of reason, people

have realized their moral principles and, as such, are free and equal citizens in a

constitutional regime; cooperation is their creed. Chantal Mouffe critically comments that

with Rawls' reasonable pluralism, "political liberalism can provide consensus among

reasonable persons who, *by definition,* are persons who accept the principles of political

liberalism."[49] More generally, a main objection to Rawls' reasonable pluralism, and the

broader neo-Kantian, rational consensus tradition is the heavy, sometimes overpowering

presence of moral, rather than political, considerations. Some, including Reinhardt

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[46] Ibid

[47] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox,* p. 23

[48] Ibid

[49] Ibid, 26

Koselleck, make this critique to such an extent that they express a belief that this tradition misunderstands the purely political.[50]

The second concept of democratic politics that agonism is offered in contrast to is called discourse theory,[51] or as Mouffe refers to it, deliberative democracy. Pursued most prominently by Jürgen Habermas, discourse theory contends that unrestricted participation in a process of free and rational public discourse is necessary to secure legitimacy in a modern democratic state. Rather than viewing the political as the forum for individual rights, Habermas understands the political as the source of people's identity as free and equal political agents. It is through political life, most ideally a political life centered on transparent and open communication, that social character and personal identity are secured. [52] Mouffe explains that the main idea behind deliberative democracy is that in a democratic polity decisions should be reached through a process of deliberation among free and equal citizens."[53] And while this notion of deliberation has been central to democracy since its inception in 5th century Athens, how 'deliberation' has been interpreted and defined has vastly differed.

Noel O'Sullivan discloses three common problems associated with discourse theory as presented by Habermas. The first is similar to the objections to Rawls' rational consensus presented previously; discourse theory seems to assume that a set of neutral procedural principles can be reached, despite the vast diversity associated with modern society. Second, critics take issues with Habermas' idea that the formation of a universal

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[50] O'Sullvian, Noël K. "The concept of the political in contemporary Western and non-Western political thought," *Heidelberg Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics,* Working Paper No. 73, June 2014, p. 4

[51] Ibid, 5

[52] Ibid

[53] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox,* 81

"rational will" is feasible. Third, Habermas' discourse theory makes a leap that transparent communication will naturally lead to consensus and uniformity. O'Sullivan states, "It is not clear, however, why Habermas ignores the possibility that transparency, even if it can be achieved, might not bring conflict and hatred instead of harmony,"[54] exemplifying this by describing the relationship between Israel and Palestine – the two "understand each other very well, but this does not guarantee a solution of any kind to their conflict."[55]

Chantal Mouffe notes that agonal theory is also presented in contrast to a third democratic theory – the aggregate model of democracy. The aggregate model predates the rational consensus and deliberative models, which are offered as alternatives to it. This theory, which was presented in Joseph Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942), focuses on the empirical rather than the normative; it understands the democratic process as one which is not centered on popular sovereignty, but on the "aggregation of preferences, taking place through political parties for which people would have the capacity to vote at regular intervals."[56] In this vein, notions of a "common good" or "general will" are subjugated to special interests. "Pluralism of interests and values ha[s] to be acknowledged as coextensive with the very idea of 'the people.'"[57]

While Mouffe presents the aggregate model in contrast to agonal theory, I struggle to understand them as definitively distinct. Mouffe believes that the aggregate model shares some of the flaws of the rational consensus and deliberative democracy theories, namely that the aggregate model still privileges rationality, forgetting the

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[54] O'Sullivan, 6
[55] Ibid
[56] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox,* 81
[57] Ibid

massive effects of the passions. But while Mouffe says that the aggregate model relies too heavily on rationality, I do not see the model she purposes as any less rational. Moreover, even if one believes that special interests only result from rational thought, a belief I find to be a bit naïve, surely one cannot reject the role that the passions play in the party politics that lie at the center of the aggregate model. Turning back to Mouffe's criticisms of the aggregate model, she also takes issue with the increased individualism that results out of an aggregate model of democracy. She advocates for the active involvement of citizens in a democracy, and argues that this kind of participation can only be procured "by multiplying the institutions, the discourses, the forms of life that foster identification with democratic values."[58] But why can't special interests or political parties foster an identification with democratic valued? And if conflicting political parties and special interests are acknowledged as inherent to politics, are they not the manifestation of multiplied institutions? Do they not represent an increase in discourses? Finally, how can they be distinguished from the "pluralism" central to Mouffe's agonal theory?

So far, this chapter has described agonism and its central ideas, and presented other theories of democratic politics that lie in contrast to agonism. It will now turn to identifying where agonism sits within broader political theory. As stated at the start of this chapter, agonism gets its name from the Greek *agon.* Andreas Kalyvas, in his chapter of Schaap's *Law and Agonistic Politics,* suggests that agonism descends from Greek Antiquity. As Kalyvas points out, *agon* in ancient Greece meant conflict or struggle, and he puts forth that *agon* was used in reference to athletic competitions, oral debates, or the

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[58] Ibid, 96

competition between characters in literature.[59] In defending a position similar to

Kalyvas', Mark Wenman explains that in Greek antiquity, agonism appeared as "the

contest between adversaries in the athletic games and rivalry among characters in tragic

drama."[60] In this light, *agon* seems to have referred to the struggle of individuals, and of

their individual souls. But neither Kalyvas nor Wenman point out any political

connotation, much less one that celebrates the effects of tension.

One can see an example of this description of the *agon,* which focuses on tension

on an individual level, by looking to the second century Greek stoic Chryssipus.

Chryssipus, it is important to note, does present a concept of positive tension. As Wendell

John Coats, Jr. explains in an endnote in his essay, "A Theory of Republican Character,"

Chryssipus puts forward a notion that moderate tension can be a source of health and

order.[61] According to Chryssipus, men's wrongdoings, shortcomings, or failures are the

result of a lack, or collapse, of tension in the soul. Right actions, on the other hand, are

"guided by right judgment together with the soul's good tension."[62] This appreciation of

tension within the soul seems to emerge out of Stoic ideas on physics, specifically those

relating to the elements. In A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley's *The Hellenistic Philosophers,* it

is noted that stoic philosophy distinguishes the elements of fire and air from those of

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[59] Kalyvas, Andreas. "The Democratic Narcissus: The Agonism of the Ancients Compared to that of the (Post)Moderns." *Law and Agonistic Politics.* Ed. Andrew Schaap. Abingdon, Oxon, GBR: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2009, p. 17-41

[60] Wenman, 35

[61] Coats, John Wendell, Jr. *A Theory of Republican Character and Related Essays*. London; Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press; Associated University Presses, 1994, p. 59

[62] Long, A.A. and D.N. Sedley. *Hellenistic Philosophers.* Cambridge Eng.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 418

earth and water. Fire and air are said to sustain themselves because of a sort of tensile breath. [63] A description of this breath states,

> 'Breath' consists of a 'through-and-through blending' of its two constitutive elements, which means that any portion of it, irrespective of size, is characterized by hot and cold. Chryssipus deduces from this that 'breath' is a dynamic continuum, in part expanding from its heat (fire) and in part contracting from its cold (air). This complex motion was described as 'tension' or 'tensile movement'… The special character of this motion is its *simultaneous* activity in opposite directions, outwards and inwards…the stoics explained the apparent stability and properties of everyday objects by the 'tensile movement' of their constituent elements.[64]

Herein, tension equates to stability, signaling an appreciation of tension in Chryssipus' stoicism. However, his praise of tension is limited to tension within the natural world of elements or within the soul of individuals. It never touches on tension within society as a whole or in the realm of politics.

Friedrich Nietzsche, however, broadens what the Greek *agon* signified, explaining that it applies to the political sphere as well.[65] As Lawrence J. Hatab writes in his 2008 work, *Nietzsche's On The Genealogy of Morality,* "Nietzsche spotlights the pervasiveness in ancient Greece of the *agon,* or contest for excellence, which operated in all cultural pursuits (in athletics, the arts, oratory, *politics*, and philosophy)."[66] The *agon* seems to have entertained the idea of the world as a forum for "the struggle of opposing (but

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[63] Ibid, 282

[64] Ibid, 288

[65] Nietzsche seems to have included some aspect of agonal theory in his own political thought, specifically in his doctrine of the will to power. As Lawrence Hatab describes in *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality* in the chapter on Nietzsche's thought and life, the reciprocal structure of Nietzsche's will to power highlights an appreciation of conflict, and refutes the notion that power could or should run without any opposition. Nietzsche's will to power includes a concept of oppositional limits, which signify agonistic power relations. (Hatab, Lawrence J.. *Nietzsche's on the Genealogy of Morality: An Introduction.* Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008,. p. 14)

[66] Hatab, 13

related) forces,"[67] and is evident in Homer's *Iliad,* Hesiod's *Theogony,* Greek tragedy, as well as in the work of philosophers, including Anaximander and Heraclitus.[68] Moreover, the Greek *agon,* as explored by Nietzsche, seems to have made a distinction that is notably similar to Mouffe's distinction between agonism and antagonism. Hatab speaks to this, saying:

> In *Homer's Contest,* Nietzsche argues that the *agon*
> emerged as a *cultivation* of more brutal natural drives in not
> striving for the annihilation of the Other, but arranging
> contests that would test skill and performance in
> competition. Accordingly, agonistic strife produced
> excellence, not obliteration, since talent unfolded in a
> struggle with competitors. In this way, the Greeks did not
> succumb to a false idea of sheer harmony, and so they
> insured a proliferation of excellence by preventing
> stagnation and uniform control. The *agon* expressed the
> general resistance of the Greeks to "unified domination"
> and the danger of unchallenged or unchallengeable
> power.[69]

However, despite Nietzsche's explanation of the Greek *agon* and its application to politics, there was "no political philosophy of agonism" in ancient Greece, nor is there any literature that seems to have been specifically devoted to it.[70] One should also note that the two giants of Greek political thought, Plato and Aristotle, did not afford any room for tension or conflict in politics.

Looking back to 4th Century BCE, Plato's writing in *The Republic* emphasizes that his political philosophy has little tolerance for pluralism, much less tension. Plato writes with justice as his end. The perfect city, which Plato depicts in *The Republic,* is just and good. In being both just and good it is perfectly ordered according to nature.

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[67] Ibid

[68] Ibid

[69] Ibid, 13-14

[70] Kalyvas, 18

This, moreover, is consistent with his analysis of justice in the individual as well, which may be useful to explore before turning to the city. It is important to mention that although Plato seems to recognize 'parts' of the city and of the soul, his thought does not fully accommodate pluralism. As represented in *The Republic,* Plato's political philosophy still emphasizes unity and condemns "divisions [as] morally unwholesome and politically fatal."[71] Plato's just city features "an organic body politic, an indivisible nation (or people), unitary royal[s] …[and] one determinable common good."[72] And most importantly, for Plato, "parts must be cast as natural, unalterable elements of an indivisible city or soul."[73]

I will look to Plato's teachings on the soul first. Through Socrates' dialectic argument with Adeimantus and Glaucon, Plato extols that for the individual "justice is respect to what is within"[74] and that, to achieve justice within, one must properly order the parts of the soul. By ordering the soul, one becomes their own sovereign entity. The notion that a proper ordering of the appetites of the soul - both the necessary and unnecessary desires - produces justice is thoroughly discussed in Book IV -

> He doesn't let...the three classes of the soul meddle with
> each other, but really sets his own...in good order and rules
> himself; he arranges himself...and *harmonizes* the three
> parts... And if there are some other parts in between, he
> binds them together and becomes *entirely one* from the
> many, *moderate and harmonized.* [75]

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[71]Rosenblum, Nancy L. *On the Side of the Angels: An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship.*
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 26

[72] Ibid

[73] Ibid, 27

[74] Bloom, Allan David. *The Republic of Plato.* New York: Basic Books, 1968 , p. 123

[75] Ibid

Through the perfect moderation and harmonization of the reasoning, the spirited, and the desiring, the soul of an individual can be just. And as Socrates states, for Plato, "the just man [is] not any different from the just city."[76] Exactly as a just soul, by being properly ordered, becomes a sovereign entity unto itself, a properly ordered city will also become sovereign and just. Again, identically to the soul of an individual, "one would find many diverse desires, pleasures, and pains"[77] within a city. To obtain justice, consequently, the city must properly organize its parts. Socrates remarks that a city must have its better parts ruling over the worse[78] and should be "entirely moderate."[79] Moderation in service of the unity of a city will make that city just, precisely as moderation in service of unity within an individual soul made that soul just. As just is virtually synonymous with good – moderation and harmony, or unanimity, will make for a good city. Herein, Plato's political thought does not accommodate pluralism. Furthermore, it embraces "harmony" and "moderation" and thereby eschews any sort of tension or conflict.

Aristotle, Plato's most famous student, parts slightly with his teacher by accommodating pluralism in his own political thought. The mixed regime that Aristotle puts forth in *Politics* accommodates "social divisions within the frame of government"[80] Moreover, while Plato, in the *Republic,* had characterized factions or parts in a city or soul as markers of injustice and advocated for unity, Aristotle sees things differently. For him, "the distribution of virtue required for unity was inconceivable."[81] Instead, Aristotle accepts the presence of parts within society as a fact. He recognizes discrete social

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[76] Ibid, 114
[77] Ibid, 109
[78] Ibid
[79] Ibid, 110
[80] Rosenblum, 81
[81] Rosenblum, 82

groupings and conflicting interests, and treats them as inevitable aspects of human society.

But Aristotle still by no means accommodates conflict or tension within his politics. True, he accepts parts, but he asserts that they must be tempered, ordered and moderated. Nancy Rosenblum comments in her book, *On the Side of the Angels,* that for Aristotle, "the Polis is a compound whole composed of differentiated parts… differences [are] acknowledged and brought into government…the public good is a judicious arrangement of heterogeneous parts."[82] In *Politics,* Aristotle discusses the possible regime types, including monarchy, aristocracy, constitutional government [polity], and their respective inversions, tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy. Through this discussion Aristotle concludes that the best of the practicable constitutions is a polity (but this is still far from the "absolute best regime" that he presents). And even this practicable polity of Books III and IV of *Politics*, which unlike his best regime is not aimed at absolute excellence, still relies of the virtue of moderation. As stated by one commentator, the virtues that a polity is supposedly capable of,

> are more defined by their usefulness in holding together a
> body politic than by their similarity to self-contained and
> self-sufficient divine-like virtues, capable of being done for
> their own sake.[83]

Aristotle's polity works to create a sense of balance and a moderate outcome; an end goal of unity underscores his thought.

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[82] Ibid

[83] Coats, Wendell John, Jr. "Aristotle's Two Best Regimes." *Political Theory and Practice: Eight Essays on a Theme.* Cranbury, NJ; London; Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press; Associated University Presses, 2003, p. 37

Identifying that the two foremost classical Greek political theorists neither afforded nor appreciated tension within politics denotes a gap in where agonism can be identified in ancient Greece. As Kalyvas admits,

> one has to revisit Greek antiquity and to sift through fragmented and dispersed textual and material sources in mythology, poetry, theatre, rhetoric, historiography, philosophy, visual representation, architecture and archaeology and try to combine and interpret the findings into an eclectic, tentative and uncertain framework that cannot but accept its own unavoidable arbitrariness.[84]

But at least some ancient Greek political thought, seen above in the discussion of the *agon,* particularly as it was described by Nietzsche, accepted an " idea that conflict, suffering, and strife are endemic in social and political life and not a contemporary condition on a journey towards reconciliation."[85]

Moving on from agonism's origins in the Greek *agon,* agonism appears to have a connection to Roman Stoicism as well. As put to words by Cicero, Roman Stoicism exhibits another acceptance and appreciation of tension. As Coats argues in his essay "Groundwork for a Theory of Republican Character in a Democratic Age," Roman Stoicism holds that a well-maintained tension within the body and soul helps to resist the corruptive effects that pleasure and pain have on one's character.[86] Coats quotes Cicero in the *Tusculan Disputations* on this point. Cicero states, "the soul must strain every nerve in the performance of its duties; in this alone does duty find its safeguard."[87] Discipline,

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[84] Kalyvas, 18

[85] Schaap, 35

[86] The antidote metaphor used in this thesis' title and discussed in the intro shines through here.

[87] Coats, "Groundwork For a Theory of Republican Character in a Democratic Age."*Civic Republicanism.* Ed. G. Kellow. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming 2015. (Coats is quoting Cicero, Tusculan Disputations, Translated by J. F. King, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 209, and 2, 23, throughout.)

like military discipline or that obtained through oratory, would help procure and sustain

tension. This still marks just a momentary appreciation of tension that is operating on the

individual level. But since internal tension helps the individual to succeed in civil life, it

has implications for the political realm as well.

However, agonistic political ideas do not receive a comprehensive, formal

introduction until the modern era when Machiavelli comments on the discord between the

Senate and the plebs of Rome in his *Discourses on Livy.* This connection (which even

Mouffe notes), in addition to the connections discussed above, allows one to recognize

agonism as an offspring of more mainstream political thought, rather than casting it off as

a contemporary, radical, fringe theory. In fact, the central tenets of agonism – that tension

is an inevitable fact of pluralist political society and is a necessary or even positive force

in politics – appear in the thought of numerous modern political thinkers. This brings to

light that, despite the fact that agonism has only gained significance as a political theory

over the last 20 years, the central ideas of agonism may not be entirely original. Although

the consolidation of its central ideas into one formalized theory is novel, as the next

chapter will emphasize, the ideas that constitute agonism have been said before.

The question, therefore, is where and by whom have these agonal ideas been put

forward? In his *Agonistic Democracy,* Mark Wenman states that agonism "represents a

contemporary adaptation of republican theory."[88] And similarly, Gulshan Khan, in his

article "Critical republicanism: Jürgen Habermas and Chantal Mouffe," points out that

within republicanism there is an acknowledgement of " the value of non-violent conflict

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[88] Wenman, 5

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in the public realm."[89] True, rather than viewing conflict as inherently detrimental, many republican theorists see "contestation and disagreement as a productive force by which to strengthen a free state."[90] And agonal theory can clearly be associated with the broad republican tradition. However, I believe that agonism's roots are not solely republican. Its forefather (speaking of Machiavelli) may have been a republican, but not all its ancestors were. As the following chapter will emphasize, theorists across a number of schools of modern political thought include some sort of appreciation of conflict and tension in their work. This ultimately underscores that agonal theory is relevant to politics in a broader way than one might imagine, and it should not be solely examined in the context of radical democratic theory, or even republicanism, but placed in dialogue with the much broader modern political tradition.

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[89] Khan, Gulshan, "Critical republicanism: Jürgen Habermas and Chantal Mouffe," *Contemporary Political Theory,* Vol. 12. New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009, p. 322
[90] Ibid

CHAPTER II
Agonism in Modern Political Thought: Moments of Appreciation and Opposition

"Seeing then the impossibility of establishing in this respect a perfect equilibrium, and that a precise middle course cannot be maintained...I believe it therefore necessary rather to take the constitution of Rome as a model than that of any other republic."
–Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*

This chapter is focused on identifying agonal theory within modern Western political tradition. It will examine a statement made towards the end of the previous chapter that identified Machiavelli as the forefather of agonal theory. From this point it will chart other moments of appreciation of tension amongst Machiavelli's contemporaries, and then mention a few moments of opposition, as agonal ideas are not universally accepted by all modern political theorists.

Machiavelli

Machiavelli, having written his magisterial *Discourses on Livy* in the 16th century, is credited as being "the most influential early modern republican."[91] However, many solely remember Machiavelli as a schemer operating in the vice driven undercurrents of Renaissance politics, motivated by power and avarice. To these people, he is the author of *The Prince;* the father of the notion that it is better to be feared than loved.[92] This painting of Machiavelli seems dark, emphasizing the shadowy aspects of Machiavelli's thought. Upon closer inspection, however, Machiavelli's political thought may not be quite so stark. Instead, Machiavelli may be a human example of *pentimento*. An art term, *pentimento* describes a sign or trace in an artistic work of an alteration, mistake, or earlier

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[91]"Machiavelli." *Encyclopedia of Political Theory*. Eds. Mark Bevir. London: SAGE, 2010; EBSCO Publishing, p. 1192

[92] Machiavelli, Niccolo, *The Prince*. Trans. Ricci, Luigi. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 1950, Chapter XVII

composition, seen through surface layers of paint on a canvas.[93] While on the surface Machiavelli was the seemingly immoral architect behind *The Prince*, careful and critical inspection allows one to see the lighter tones of his thought emerging from the background.

As Harvey Mansfield argues in the preface to his book *New Modes and Orders: A Study of the Discourses on Livy,* to appreciate Machiavelli's broad contributions to political thought, especially to the American tradition, one need look beyond the "vulgar" conception of Machiavelli as "a teacher of evil."[94] In perceiving that Machiavelli did not aim to introduce "evil" into politics, but instead aimed to introduce republicanism into renaissance politics, one can better appreciate these contributions. In fact, as Harvey Mansfield states, one "can learn to see how the control of things not previously or usually thought political is represented in his discussion of political things."[95] In this vein, this chapter will argue that Machiavelli is the first to explicitly introduce tension as an aspect of the political. It will then examine Machiavelli's comments on the usefulness of controlling, or maintaining, well-balanced tension to conclude that Machiavelli is the forefather of modern agonal political thought.

Machiavelli's thoughts on tension in politics are most obvious in Book I of the *Discourses on the Ten Books of Titus Livy.* Despite the fact that *The Prince* often outshines the *Discourses* as Machiavelli's most infamous work, the latter has been regarded as the truest to his actual political thinking. From this perspective, the *Discourses* exhibits Machiavelli's preference for republican schemes of government and

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[93] "Pentimento," *OED Online*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014

[94] Mansfield, Harvey C., *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders: A Study of the Discourses on Livy.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979, p. 8

[95] Ibid

explains how they might be maintained. As Maurizio Viroli points out in his biography of

Machiavelli, entitled *Niccolo's Smile*, "the *Discourses* became an intellectual and

political guide for all those who embraced the ideals of republican liberty and sought…to

replace the rule of princes and kings with free republics."[96]

Machiavelli details the history of the Roman republic not in an effort to simply

recount what has already been written down, but rather, to "persuade his readers of the

political *wisdom* of the Romans and to move his readers to imitate them."[97] It is with this

in mind that one can more fully appreciate Machiavelli's novel statement that the stability

and longevity of the Roman republic was a product of the tension existing between the

Senate and the people, and that it was this that kept the republic free, and allowed it to

avoid stagnancy and delay decay.[98] In this statement, Machiavelli is introducing tension

as inherent to the political. As Gisela Bock points out in her chapter on civil discord in

Machiavelli and Republicanism, Machiavelli demonstrates "the intrinsic conflictuality of

the political universe."[99] And from there he goes further, advocating that by controlling

or maintaining well-balanced political tension, a republic may flourish.

Underlying Machiavelli's appreciation of tension is an accommodation of

pluralism. In *The Discourses on Livy,* Machiavelli describes the *plebs* and the *grandi* of

Rome as distinct social groups and accepts the existence and legitimacy of both.

Machiavelli, however, not only accepts pluralism, but also accepts and appreciates the

tension that results from such pluralism, which he regards as inevitable, noting that the

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[96]Viroli, Maurizio. *Niccolo`'s Smile: A Biography of Machiavelli*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000, p. 190

[97] Ibid, 184

[98] Machiavelli, Niccolo, *Discourses on Livy,* Trans. Ricci, Luigi. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 1950*,* Book I, ch ii-vi

[99] Bock, Gisela, Skinner, Quentin, and Viroli, Maurizio, *Machiavelli and Republicanism*. Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 182

nobility and the people had long been at ends. Machiavelli rejects unity as essentially

impossible. Exemplifying this through the Roman example, he observes that when the

Tarquins were expelled there seemed to be a "very great union" between the plebs and

the Senate. However, he casts this aside as an untruthful aberration; the Senate was

merely attempting to secure the plebs as allies. Following the death of the Tarquins, "the

nobles began to spit out the venom against the plebs which they had held in their breasts

and harmed it in every way they could."[100] For Machiavelli, therefore, unity can only be

the product of deceit. Disunion and the tension that results from disunion are inevitable

and inherent to politics. But Machiavelli does not treat disunion, as represented by the

"quarrels of the Senate and the people of Rome," as terribly destructive. In this vein, he

separates himself from those in the classical tradition who would view such a conflict as

purely negative, disorderly, and turbulent[101]– referring to Plato and Aristotle in particular.

While Plato and Aristotle would have seen the disunion between the Senate and the plebs

as an imminent threat, Machiavelli praises it.

Here, the novelty of Machiavelli's commentary on the discord between the Senate

and the plebs of Rome becomes even more evident. For him, this civil discord was "the

leaven and cement of a free republic."[102] He is sure to point out that the disunion seems to

have brought about little harm; it did not bring about exile or death, nor did it divide the

republic. He states,

> Within the space of over three hundred years, the
> differences between these parties caused but very few exiles,

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[100] Machiavelli, *Discourses,* I, ch. iii
[101] Mansfield, *New Modes and Orders,* 43
[102] Bock et al., 182

and cost still less blood; they cannot therefore be regarded
as having been very injurious and fatal to a republic.[103]

Machiavelli also emphasizes that the tumults were not detrimental to virtue in Rome.

Rather, he explains that "good examples [of virtue] arise from good education, good

education from good laws, and good laws from the very tumults"[104] in question. Thus,

while Machiavelli holds the diverse humors of the Senate and plebs to be irreconcilable,

he understands the discord between them as a positive force. According to his headings for

chapters three and four of Book I, Machiavelli asserts that the tension between the Senate

and the plebs "caused the creation of the tribunes of the plebs in Rome, which made the

republic more perfect,"[105] and that it also "made that republic free and powerful."[106]

However, while Machiavelli promises to go through the events that led to the creation of

the tribunes, and thereby secured Rome's liberty and power, he fails to do so. At this

point, therefore, I will turn to Livy and detail the tumults to which Machiavelli is

referring.

In Book II, Chapter 23 of the *History of Rome,* Livy states that "the patricians and

the plebeians were bitterly hostile to one another."[107] He explains that this was largely

because of the poor conditions of the debtors. Livy shares the story of one debtor, a

soldier-turned-slave, who appears before the Forum. He is described as corpse-like,

emaciated, and nearly savage in appearance. According to Livy, upon seeing this man and

hearing his story, "a great outcry arose; the excitement was not confined to the Forum, it

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[103] Machiavelli, *Discourses,* ch iv
[104] Ibid
[105] Ibid, ch. iii
[106] Ibid, ch. iv
[107] Livius, Titus. "Livy's History of Rome: Book II." *The History of Rome.* Ed. Ernest Rhys. Trans. Rev. Canon Roberts. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd, 1905, chapter 23

spread everywhere throughout the City,"[108] and the plebeians actively revolted against the nobility. Livy states, "civic discord rent the State in twain."[109] Livy details another tumult in chapter 28. He explains that in this episode the Senate passed a levy calling the plebs to active service. However,

> After dismissing the senate, the consuls ascended the tribunal and called out the names of those liable to active service. Not a single man answered to his name. The people, standing round as though in formal assembly, declared that the plebs could no longer be imposed upon, the consuls should not get a single soldier until the promise made in the name of the State was fulfilled. Before arms were put into their hands, every man's liberty must be restored to him, that they might fight for their country and their fellow-citizens and not for tyrannical masters.

The Senate refused this request, and demanded the consuls to enforce the levy. As the consuls attempted to do so, a fight erupted between the Senators and the plebians. Livy is careful to note that "there had, however, been no stones thrown or weapons used, it had resulted in more noise and angry words than personal injury."[110] In response to this episode, the Senate created a Dictator to rule over the plebs. But a "man of moderate temper", who was not feared by the plebs, M. Valerius, was appointed as Dictator. Ultimately, Valerius resigned the Dictatorship out of frustration with how the Senate continued to treat the plebs and how it navigated the conflicts between the warring factions.

As wars were waged, the contests between the patricians and the plebs continued within Rome. Livy remarks, "the course which domestic affairs were taking continued to

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108 Ibid
109 Ibid, bk. II, ch. 24
110 Ibid, ch. 29

be a source of anxiety to both the patricians and the plebeians."[111] Eventually, when the

discord intensified even more greatly, a large number of plebeians withdrew from the city

to the Sacred Mount about three miles away. At this point,

> A great panic seized the City, mutual distrust led to a state
> of universal suspense. Those plebeians who had been left
> by their comrades in the City feared violence from the
> patricians; the patricians feared the plebeians who still
> remained in the City, and could not make up their minds
> whether they would rather have them go or stay. "How
> long," it was asked, "would the multitude who had seceded
> remain quiet? What would happen if a foreign war broke
> out in the meantime?" They felt that all their hopes rested
> on concord amongst the citizens, and that this must be
> restored at any cost.[112]

And as a result, the Senate sent Menenius Agrippa, who was of plebeian origin, to make

amends. Livy explains that Agrippa won over the plebeians by describing a fable of the

parts of the body warring against each other as a metaphor for the discord between the

Senate and the plebs. In the negotiations for reconciliation that followed, "an agreement

was arrived at, the terms being that the plebs should have its own magistrates, whose

persons were to be inviolable, and who should have the right of affording protection

against the consuls. And further, no patrician should be allowed to hold that office."[113]

Herein the tribunes were created.

Having charted the events that Machiavelli fails to describe, we can turn to his

assertions about their importance. As stated above, Machiavelli asserts that the tension

between the Senate and the plebs "caused the creation of the tribunes of the plebs in

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[111] Ibid, ch. 31
[112] Ibid, ch. 32
[113] Ibid, ch. 33

Rome, which made the republic more perfect."[114] He adds that it also "made that republic free and powerful."[115] The following paragraphs will examine these claims.

At the end of chapter 3 of Book I of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli states that the "the troubles of Rome," (speaking of the discord between the Senate and the plebs,) "occasioned the creation of the Tribunes."[116] In turn, the Tribunes "formed a powerful barrier between the Senate and the people, which curbed the insolence of the former."[117] Thus, the Tribunes provided a formal system to effectively control and maintain the discord between these two groups; they functioned as a check on the nobles' power, and prevented their abuse of the people. But furthermore, the creation of the Tribunes also constituted Rome as a properly mixed regime, introducing a "popular" or "democratic" element of government to the "monarchical" and "aristocratic" institutions that had been in place. As such, Rome became what "sagacious legislators" have determined to be "most stable and solid."[118] Therefore, it was through the discord between the Senate and the plebs that "a combination was formed of the three powers, which rendered the constitution perfect."[119]

The next major benefit that Machiavelli identifies as a product of the tension between the Senate and the plebs is that "all the laws that are favorable to liberty result from the opposition of these parties to each other, as may easily be seen from the events that occurred in Rome."[120] By making this point, Machiavelli extends his commentary on

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[114] Machiavelli, *Discourses,* I, ch. iii
[115] Ibid, ch. iv
[116] Ibid, ch. iii
[117] Ibid
[118] Ibid, ch. ii
[119] Ibid, ch. iii
[120] Ibid, ch. iv

the creation of the tribunes. As was made clear above, for Machiavelli, the disunion between the Senate and the plebs, as described in the events chronicled by Livy, was the precise cause for the creation of the Tribunes. But these events also afforded "the people the opportunity of giving vent, so to say, their ambition."[121] And the tribunes, once created, still provided the people with an institution through which to "vent." Machiavelli says of the tribunes, "they cannot be praised too highly; for besides giving to the people a share in the public administration, these Tribunes were established as the most assured guardians of Roman liberty."[122] Machiavelli does not see the people's "venting" as detrimental, but instead holds that it guarded liberty in Rome, because he trusts the people, more than the nobles, to best safeguard liberty. This is evident when he states, "the demands of a free people are rarely pernicious to their liberty; they are generally inspired by oppressions, experienced or apprehended."[123]

However, Machiavelli does eventually accept the quarrels between the people and Senate of Rome as "the cause of [its] loss of liberty,"[124] and inquires whether Rome could have employed a system based on unity as had existed in Sparta and Venice. In assessing this question, Machiavelli concludes that because both Sparta and Venice were generally small enough in number and did not welcome newcomers into government they were able to preserve their systems of government and enjoy unity. Machiavelli determines that for Rome to have accomplished this it would not have been able "to employ the people in the armies, like the Venetians, or…open the doors to strangers, as had been the case in

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[121] Ibid
[122] Ibid
[123] Ibid,
[124] Ibid, ch. vi

Sparta."[125] Rome, however, took the opposite path. As a result, Rome vested more power

with the people, and invited contest and turbulence. Despite this, however, Machiavelli

asserts that

> had [Rome] been more tranquil, it would necessarily have
> resulted that she would have been more feeble, and that she
> would have lost with her energy also the ability of
> achieving that high degree of greatness to which she
> attained.[126]

For Machiavelli, when tension between factions is absent, political systems will be

characterized by stagnation, or will be susceptible to decay; they will be characterized by

weakness, rather than power. Moreover, although Machiavelli does acquiesce in the idea

that the hypothetically best political existence for a State is one that is peaceful within

and without, and marked by equilibrium and tranquility, he notes that such an existence is

impossible. Such an existence could only exist in a political vacuum, devoid of human

nature. For as he states at the end of Chapter VI –

> As all human things are kept in a perpetual movement, and
> can never remain stable, states naturally either rise or
> decline, and necessity compels them to many acts to which
> reason will not influence them…Seeing then the
> impossibility of establishing in this respect a perfect
> equilibrium, and that a precise middle course cannot be
> maintained…I believe it therefore necessary rather to take
> the constitution of Rome as a model than that of any other
> republic, and to tolerate the differences that will arise
> between the Senate and the people as an inconvenient
> necessity in achieving greatness like that of Rome.[127]

In his extensive work, *The Machiavellian Moment,* JGA Pocock comments that

Machiavelli's appreciation of tension is "shocking and incredible to minds which

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125 Ibid

126 Ibid

127 Ibid

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identified union with stability and virtue, conflict with innovation and decay."[128] But Machiavelli's "appreciation" becomes less shocking after considering that Rome's conflict allowed it to create the great empire, which has long since characterized, and which ultimately destroyed, the republic. In sum, in asserting that the conflict between the Senate and plebs created the tribunes, thus protecting Rome's liberty and sustaining its power, Machiavelli holds that "good effects of good order can come from apparent disorder."[129]

Having explained how Machiavelli identifies conflict as positive, it is useful to note that not *all* conflict is good in Machiavelli's eyes. While he accepts, even applauds, "inevitable and productive conflict," like that existing between the Senate and the plebs, he condemns other conflicts. For instance, as Bock, Skinner, and Viroli point out, in the Florentine Histories, "Machiavelli seems to have abandoned this positive evaluation of civil conflict."[130] This complicates an understanding of Machiavelli as a proponent of tension in politics. Examining the conflicts that he detests, however, we can begin to reconcile these claims that appear to conflict. First, Machiavelli condemns conflict like that "between rival families," which he experienced in Florence.[131] In "Civil discord in Machiavelli's Istorie Fiorentine," Geneva Bock points out that, for Machiavelli, types of discord like that arising between the Senate and the plebs of Rome is "natural, unavoidable and may even lead, if checked and handled in a civilized way, to equality and the common good."[132] Other types of discord, like conflict between competing

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[128] Pocock, J.G.A. *Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Political Tradition.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975, p. 194

[129] Mansfield, *New Modes and Orders,* 43

[130] Bock et al., 182

[131] Wenman, 57 (quoting Bock et al., 197)

[132] Bock et al., 197

political families, "are merely struggles for power, are avoidable and hence should be avoided."[133] Bock quotes Machiavelli's Florentine Histories, in which he argues against divisions of "*sette* [sects, factions] and partisans," for example divisions between families, clans, client groups, and patronage systems.[134]

It seems that there are two principle factors that distinguish these two types of tension. First, inevitability – tension that is inevitable *cannot* be avoided, and therefore *must* be controlled and put to good use. It seems an inherent aspect of political society and therefore of history. And while it had its defects, it also has its rewards. The second factor, relating to the resolution of conflict, seems to be the presence of an institutional system that can house or accommodate tension. The tension existing between the Senate and the plebs was institutionalized within the Roman government through the creation of the tribunes. Therefore, while conflicts still arose between the noble and popular classes, they raged on within the confines of the political apparatus and the "quarrels between the nobles and the people in Rome were settled by discussions."[135] As such, the disunion between the Senate and the plebs did not threaten the political apparatus itself. In Florence, on the other hand, conflict ended in violence; it was not directed through formal political channels, through which its passions could have been put to good use. As a result, it threatened the political system itself.

The pages above have fleshed out how Machiavelli introduces tension as an inevitable aspect of the political, and defends its usefulness to a republic. The chapter will now turn to address the question of where Machiavelli sits in relation to agonal theory.

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[133] Ibid
[134] Ibid, 196-197
[135] Ibid, 188

Modern political theorists, Leo Strauss for example, have highlighted the originality of Machiavelli's position in the *Discourses;* Strauss labels it as a "wholly new praise of discord."[136] And under the entry for "Machiavelli" in the *International Encyclopedia of Political Science*, his vision of social institutions, "which suggests that popular discord makes society free and powerful," is described as "agonistic" and "dynamic."[137]

Machiavelli is also regularly referenced in the work of agonal theorists. He is cited by Chantal Mouffe as the "first to recognize" an understanding of the political as "collective participation in a public sphere where interests are confronted, conflicts resolved, divisions exposed, confrontations staged, and in that way, liberty secured."[138] Similarly, Mark Wenman, in his book *Agonistic Democracy,* notes, "indeed, we can trace the first explicit formulation in western political thought of the agonistic idea of the positive value of conflict to Machiavelli's *The Discourses,* where he developed the idea that internal conflict can contribute to the vitality of the republic."[139] As such, Machiavelli seems to emerge as a forefather of the agonal tradition.

While the previous chapter pointed to agonism's origins in the Greek *agon* and noted an appreciation of tension in Roman Stoicism, this section seeks to underscore the fact that Machiavelli puts forth the first explicit, formal agonal political perspective. Machiavelli's appreciation of tension, however, does not solely appear in the work of modern agonal theorists. Rather, Machiavelli's thoughts on tension as inevitable, and potentially positive, appear at various moments in the work of a number of modern political theorists who came after him. Therefore, this study will now turn to identifying

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[136] Strauss, Leo. *Thoughts on Machiavelli.* Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959, pg 95

[137] "Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527)," *International Encyclopedia of Political Science,* Eds. Bertrand Badie, et al. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2011. Web.

[138] Mouffe, *The Return of the Political,* p. 57

[139] Wenman, 52-53

some of the other examples of an appreciation on tension within modern Western political thought, including moments of appreciation in the work of Montesquieu, Edmund Burke, J.S. Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville, after which it will note a few moments of opposition.

Montesquieu

First turning to the eighteenth century French political philosopher, we see that Montesquieu follows Machiavelli in displaying an appreciation of tension in his political thought. Scholars have remarked that Montesquieu was profoundly influenced by Machiavelli.[140] This is apparent in Montesquieu's remarks in *Considerations on Greatness of the Romans and their Decline,* especially his discussion on the dissensions of Rome. He states,

> We hear in the authors only of the dissensions that ruined Rome, without seeing that *these dissensions were necessary to it,* that they had always been there and always had to be. It was the greatness of the republic that caused all the trouble and changed popular tumults into civil wars. There had to be dissensions in Rome, for warriors who were so proud, so audacious, so terrible abroad could not be very moderate at home. To ask for men in a free state who are bold in war and timid in peace is to wish the impossible. And, as a general rule, whenever we see everyone tranquil in a state that calls itself a republic, we can be sure that liberty does not exist there.[141]

Here we see Montesquieu not only accepting the conflict between the Senate and the plebs as inevitable, but also, just like Machiavelli, regarding it as *necessary* and defending it as the source of Rome's liberty. This, Montesquieu believed, applied outside the case of Rome. As F.T.H. Fletcher writes in *Montesquieu and English Politics,*

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[140] Rahe, Paul Anthony, *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Tocqueville & the Modern Prospect.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, among others.

[141] Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat,baron de. *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline.* Trans. David Lowenthal. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968., ch. IX

"political divisions were not merely salutary, but necessary in a free state."[142] Though political divisions may bring about conflict and agitation, they are still desirable because, as Montesquieu explains in *Spirit of the Laws,* tranquility signifies despotism. He states, "as fear is the principle of despotic government, its end is tranquility; but this tranquility cannot be called a peace: no it is only the silence of those towns which the enemy is ready to invade."[143] A free society, on the other hand, will be marked by "all the passions being unrestrained, hatred, envy, jealousy and an ambition desire of riches and honors."[144] But as Montesquieu observes, "were it otherwise, the state would be in the condition of a man weakened by sickness, who is without passions because he is without strength."[145]

Montesquieu's appreciation of conflict in politics seems to become complicated, however, in his lessons on the separation of powers. On the one hand, Montesquieu claims that power can only be checked by competing power. He makes this perfectly clear in Chapter XI, 4 of *Spirit of the Laws,* when he states, "it is necessary from the very nature of things that power should be a check to power." Constitutions, according to Montesquieu, should be designed with this in mind – hence the separation of powers. Moreover, as Franz Neumann describes in his introduction to Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws,* Montesquieu understood that different social groups or interests would characterize each of the powers. To Montesquieu, "the monarch…represented social interests different from those of the legislature; the legislature…was to represent the

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[142] Fletcher, F. T. H., *Montesquieu and English Politics (1750-1800).* Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1939, p. 166

[143] Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat, baron de., *Spirit of the Laws,* New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1949, V, 14

[144] Ibid, XIX, 27

[145] Ibid

aristocracy and the bourgeoisie respectively; while the judiciary…was to represent

everybody, and hence nobody."[146] With this arrangement, it would be expected that each

power would have a very different prerogative. However, Montesquieu states in Book XI,

chapter 6, "these three powers should naturally form a state of repose or inaction. But as

there is a necessity for movement in the course of human affairs, they are forced to move,

but still in concert."[147] Herein, it seems that the separate powers must agree, which is

inconsistent with his appreciations of conflict and tension that were outlined above.

There is an interpretation, however, which uncovers a sense of consistency

throughout his thought. Perhaps what Montesquieu means by "moving in concert" is

similar to his discussion in *Considerations* on "dissonance" and "harmony" as they relate

to unity.[148] In *Considerations,* following his contention that dissention was not the cause

of Rome's downfall, Montesquieu says,

> What is called union in a body politic is a very equivocal
> thing. The true kind is a union of harmony, whereby all the
> parts, however opposed they may appear, cooperate for the
> general good of society — as dissonances in music
> cooperate in producing overall concord. In a state where we
> seem to see nothing but commotion there can be union —
> that is, a harmony resulting in happiness, which alone is
> true peace.[149]

What Montesquieu seems to be describing is what we previously observed Mouffe

describe as agonism. Surely there is conflict, tension, disagreement, and debate in

politics. However, it is a debate between adversaries, not enemies. Opposition operates

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[146] Neumann, Franz, "Editor's Introduction." *The Spirit of the Laws* by Baron Charles de Montesquieu. New York: Hafner Press/Macmillan Publishing Co., 1949, p. lviii

[147] Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws,* XI, 6

[148] It's noteworthy that all of these are musical terms. I believe this strengthens this interpretation as these statements are connected through Montesquieu's choice to use musical vocabulary in both instances.

[149] Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat, baron de. *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline.* Trans. David Lowenthal. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968, IX

within an agreed upon institutional framework, and all opposition operates in the name of the good. Ultimately this produces some sort of unity. But, just as Mouffe expounds, it is unity in "a context of conflict and diversity."[150] Moreover, Montesquieu offers this dissonant concord in contrast to what he calls "the concord of Asiatic despotism," in which he argues, "there is always real dissension...if we see any union there, it is not citizens who are united but dead bodies buried one next to the other."[151] Herein, perhaps what Montesquieu meant by "moving in concert," is not that the powers must always necessarily be in perfect "unison," but rather that, despite their differences, they must exist under agreed-upon institutions and work towards the general good of society. In doing this, any dissonances between them will augment the harmony of society, rather than threaten it. Such an interpretation allows one to discern a much more consistent, comprehensive appreciation of tension throughout Montesquieu's political thought.

Burke

Irish born, eighteenth century British politician, Edmund Burke also appears to accept tension as inevitable in, and ultimately positive for politics in his appreciation of parties. Harvey Mansfield, in his work *Statesmanship and Party Government,* shares that in 1769 Burke commented that "party divisions are inseparable from free government."[152] In this vein, Burke appears to acknowledge division and conflict between these groups as an inevitable fact of political society, and supports their subsequent placement in institutions of government. Burke's recognition of division and conflict as inevitable goes further – for Burke, opposition was tolerable, even desirable. Parties, according to Burke,

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[150] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox,* 102

[151] Montesquieu, *Considerations,* IX

[152] Mansfield, Harvey, *Statesmanship and Party Government; a Study of Burke and Bolingbroke.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1965, p. 106

are bodies of men united "for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed."[153] In working to advance their particular conception of the good, however, parties exist in rivalry with one another. Burke expresses an acceptance of such party division and rivalry. He remarks that parties are "on the whole operating for good."[154] Because parties are accepted within institutions of government, what Burke seems to be introducing is an idea of regulated rivalry. As explained by Nancy Rosenblum in *On the Side of the Angels,* "regulated rivalry simply says that parties can serve this basic good of nonviolent, institutionalized conflict and political change."[155]

Burke is especially appreciative of partisan discord in cases when the power of one group needs to be checked or curtailed. For Burke, the best way to prevent one corrupt, power-seeking group was to establish other groups in opposition. This lies behind his comment in "Thoughts," which states, "when bad men combine, the good men must associate; else they will fall one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle."[156] For Burke, this is essential to maintain liberty. As John Plamenatz writes in his review of Burke's "Thoughts" in a 1951 issue of *Parliamentary Affairs,*[157] for Burke, "if freedom is to survive, there must, wherever there are parties, be more than one party,

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[153] Burke, Edmund, *Thoughts on the Present Discontents; the Two Speeches on America*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999

[154] Ibid

[155] Rosenblum, 125

[156] Burke, *Thoughts*

[157] He is talking about both Burke and Madison in this statement, but I am just focusing on Burke now, as Madison will be discussed in the Chapter concerned with the United States.

and that they must, since it is their nature to strive for power, be always competing for it and yet never able to put an end to the competition."[158]

Burke's praise of tension and conflict seems to go even further than his appreciation of partisan conflict. Burke also appreciates tension and conflict within government institutions themselves. In discussing the separation of powers in government, Burke puts forward the idea that "the common good emerges as the result of the interaction, perhaps the competition, of the parts of government and society."[159] As such, he expounds the idea that conflict and debate, rather than unity and consensus, between institutions of government may procure good effects for political society.

Mill

Nineteenth century Englishman John Stuart Mill also exhibits an appreciation of conflict and debate in his political thought. Primarily in his essay *On Liberty,* Mill suggests that dissent can be advantageous despite its dangers or unorthodox nature.[160] First, Mill puts forward that conflicts of opinion and debate are useful on the individual level. To Mill, rational opinion and conduct only come to fruition through conflict and debate. In his work *Government by Dissent,* Robert Martin outlines Mill's thoughts on the value of dissent on the individual level. He points out that Mill believes that dissenters' views are "on balance, productive because they make the rest of us reevaluate our own views, making what would otherwise be "dead dogma" into "living truth.""[161] Mill expresses this with his discussion of those who are wise. The wise, according to

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[158] Plamenatz, John, "Book Reviews." *Parliamentary Affairs* Volume I. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951, p. 219

[159] Mansfield, *Statesmanship,* 161

[160] Martin, Robert W.T. *Government by Dissent Protest, Resistance, and Radical Democratic Thought in the Early American Republic*. New York: New York University Press, 2013, p. 4

[161] Ibid

Mill, have become wise because they accept and consider the criticism and feedback of other opinions. He states, "in the case of any person whose judgment is really deserving of confidence, how has it become so? Because he has kept his mind open to criticism of his opinions and conduct. Because it has been his practice to listen to all that could be said against him."[162]

Mill extends this appreciation of conflict and debate past the individual level, extending it to politics generally. For Mill, in the political realm, "only through diversity of opinion is there…a chance of fair-play to all sides of the truth."[163] Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, Mill appreciates politics as the art of balancing opposing sides (as represented through parties) and maintaining a tradition of conflict. Such a tradition will prevent any one side, party, or perspective from growing too strong, which is vital for the health of the state. He writes,

> In politics, again, it is almost a commonplace that a party of order or stability, and a party of progress or reform, are both necessary elements of a healthy state of political life…Each of these modes of thinking derives its utility from the deficiencies of the other; but it is in a great measure the *opposition* of the other that keeps each within the limits of reason and sanity. Unless opinions favourable to democracy and to aristocracy, to property and to equality, to co-operation and to competition, to luxury and to abstinence, to sociality and individuality, to liberty and discipline, and all the other standing *antagonisms* of practical life, are expressed with equal freedom, and enforced and defended with equal talent and energy, there is no chance of both elements obtaining their due; one scale is sure to go up and the other down.[164]

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[162] Mill, John Stuart, *On Liberty*. Luton: Andrews UK, 2011, Chapter 2
[163] Ibid
[164] Ibid

Mill remarks that maintaining a balanced tension between opposites is challenging, but, as emphasized above, necessary for the sake of "reason" and "sanity," not to mention freedom. Herein, Mill clearly appreciates conflict as an expedient political reality, and defends the maintenance of a balanced tension through dissention and debate amongst competing parties or viewpoints.

Tocqueville

Turning to the nineteenth century, French political thinker and historian, Alexis de Tocqueville showcases an appreciation of tension in his thought. As stated by Eric Plaag in his introduction to a translation of *Democracy in America,* "Tocqueville's *Democracy* remains a masterful display of insight and foresight into all things American. Coming from a twenty-six year-old tourist, his observations seem to display nothing short of pure genius."[165] Similarly, in their introduction to *Democracy in America,* Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop remark, "*Democracy in America* is at once the best book ever written on democracy and the best book ever written on America."[166] This argument, while undeniably bold, highlights the particular usefulness of Alexis de Tocqueville to this chapter. *Democracy in America's* contents and contribution to political science extend far beyond an acute analysis of the American political system; the work provides an equally acute analysis of democratic government generally. Tocqueville states in his own introduction, "I confess that, in America, I saw more than America; I sought there

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[165] Plaag, Eric, "Introduction to the New Edition." *Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville. New York: Barnes and Noble Publishing, 2003 p. xvii

[166] Mansfield, Harvey C. and Delba Winthrop. "Editors Introduction." *Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. xvii

the image of democracy itself, with its inclinations, its character its prejudices, and its passions, in order to learn what we have to fear or to hope from its progress."[167]

While much of Tocqueville's commentary on democracy has been studied extensively, one of his significant contributions seems to have received less attention – the role of tension in liberal democratic politics. It is this, often overlooked, contribution that this study is most concerned with. Throughout Tocqueville's work in *Democracy in America*, one can identify tension's role in politics as it plays out in broader democratic theory, and then focus in more narrowly, examining how tension fits into American democracy specifically. The latter examination is one the next chapter will undertake.

Tocqueville accommodates more than one single tension within his political theory, but the principle tension that he discusses is that which exists between equality and liberty. Tocqueville opens *Democracy in America* by establishing an equality of conditions as the fundamental fact of American democracy. But he pushes this further, claiming that there is a worldwide trend towards such an equality of conditions and towards democratic institutions as well. For Tocqueville, this social phenomenon has political implications; after all, "it is impossible to believe that equality will not eventually find its way to the political world, as it does everywhere else."[168] Just as men are socially equal, they are to be politically equal as well. As such, Tocqueville identifies equality as the idol of democratic nations. He remarks, "nothing can satisfy them without equality, and they would rather perish than lose it."[169] Tocqueville points out, however, that while equality may be democratic nations' first love, it is hardly their only. "On the

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[167] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* xxxv
[168] Ibid, 35
[169] Ibid

contrary, they have an instinctive love of [liberty]."[170] But liberty, or as Tocqueville often refers to it, freedom, is a principle value of democracy, it is not "the distinguishing characteristic of democratic ages."[171]

According to Tocqueville, democracy is best maintained when equality and liberty are properly balanced. In part II, chapter 1, of the second volume of *Democracy in America* Tocqueville remarks,

> It is possible to imagine an extreme point at which freedom and equality would meet and be confounded together. Let us suppose that all the members of the community take a part in the government, and that each of them has an equal right to take a part in it. As none is different from his fellows, none can exercise a tyrannical power: men will be completely free, because they are entirely equal; and they will all be perfectly equal, because they are entirely free. To this ideal state democratic nations tend.[172]

But he continues,

> Equality, pushed to its furthest extent, may be confounded with freedom, yet there is good reason for distinguishing the one from the other. The taste which men have for liberty, and that which they feel for equality, are, in fact, two different things.[173]

As Tocqueville sees it, equality and liberty do not always lend themselves to one another. Rather, "equality awakens in men several propensities extremely dangerous to freedom."[174] First, Tocqueville comments that equality leads those within a democracy to have contempt for "forms." To those focused on equality, forms – comparable to modern social norms or manners – reak of aristocracy. However, Tocqueville argues that

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[170] Ibid

[171] Ibid, 466

[172] Ibid, 465

[173] Ibid, 466

[174] Ibid, 694

forms are essential to freedom. Forms perpetually serve as a retardant, a sedative. According to Tocqueville, this "is the very thing which renders forms so useful to freedom: for their chief merit is to serve as a barrier between the strong and the weak, the ruler and the people, to retard the one, and give the other time to look about him."[175] Second, Tocqueville asserts that in their commitment to equality, a democratic people will often undervalue the rights of private persons. He states that because they are relatively new rights, and, historically, have not been significant, "the rights of private persons amongst democratic nations are… often sacrificed without regret, and almost always violated without remorse."[176] Cumulatively, his warnings echo a statement he makes in Volume I of *Democracy in America,* in which he observes, "in a state where the citizens are all nearly equal, it becomes difficult for them to preserve their independence against the aggressions of power. No one among them being strong enough to engage in the struggle alone with advantage, nothing but a general combination can protect their liberty."[177] Herein, achieving universal equality can, at times, directly threaten liberty. When this happens, a substantial, unified effort would be required to safeguard liberty. But, as Tocqueville points out, "such a union is not always possible."[178] And although Tocqueville does not take the same care to explore how liberty may infringe upon equality, one can imagine several instances in which this may happen. Thus, for Tocqueville, properly constituted democracy is conflicted at its core.

The paradox between equality and liberty is not, however, Tocqueville's primary fear for democracy. Rather, Tocqueville's principal concern is that in attempting to

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[175] Ibid, 695
[176] Ibid
[177] Ibid, 35
[178] Ibid

resolve this tension in favor of equality, democratic nations will descend into despotism.

Specifically, Tocqueville fears what he calls a "soft despotism." In contrast to his

depiction of a 'healthy democracy', characterized by action and contest, Tocqueville

paints despotism as a relatively tranquil political state. As Paul Rahe examines in *Soft*

Despotism, Democracy's Drift, the despotism that Tocqueville anticipates "would be

more extensive and gentler or softer, and it would degrade men without tormenting

them."[179] Tocqueville's in-depth description of such despotism is as follows –

> an innumerable multitude of men, all equal and alike, incessantly
> endeavoring to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut
> their lives. Each of them, living apart, is a stranger to the fate of all the rest
> – his children and his private friends constitute to him the whole of
> mankind; as for the as for the rest of his fellow-citizens…he exists but in
> himself and for himself alone; and if his kindred still remain to him, he
> may be said at any rate to have lost his country. Above him stands an
> immense and tutelary power, which takes upon itself alone to secure their
> gratifications, and to watch over their fate, that power is absolute, minute,
> regular, provident, and mild…it seeks…to keep them in perpetual
> childhood; it is well content that the people should rejoice, provided they
> think of nothing but rejoicing. For their happiness such a government
> labors, but it chooses to be the sole agent and the only arbiter of that
> happiness: it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their
> necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns,
> directs their industry, regulates the descent of property, and subdivides
> their inheritances: what remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking
> and all the trouble of living? Thus, it everyday renders the exercise of the
> free agency of man less and less frequent; it circumscribes the will within
> a narrower range, and gradually robs a man of all the uses of himself. The
> principle of equality has prepared men for these things; it has predisposed
> men to endure them, and oftentimes to look on them as benefits. After
> having thus successively taken each member of the community in its
> powerful grasp, and fashioned him at will, the supreme power then
> extends its arm over the whole community. It covers the surface of society
> with a network of small complicated rules, minute and uniform, through
> which the most original minds and the most energetic characters cannot
> penetrate, to rise above the crowd. The will of man is not shattered, but
> softened, bent, and guided; men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are
> constantly restrained from acting: such a power does not destroy, but it

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[179] Ibid, 626

prevents existence; it does not tyrannize, but it compresses; enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to be nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd. [180]

Ultimately, Tocqueville finds that such a despotism "often promises to make amends for a thousand previous ills; it supports the right, it protects the oppressed, and it maintains public order. The nation is lulled by the temporary prosperity which it produced."[181] On the other hand, the maintenance of a balanced tension between equality and liberty is generally established with difficulty in the midst of storms; it is perfected by civil discord."[182] Therefore, a balanced relationship between equality and liberty is not easily achieved or maintained; it will not be comfortable or smooth. However, Tocqueville's description of "soft despotism" emphasizes that even more dangerous than the perils of conflicts between equality and liberty, is the irradiation of the tension between these two principles of democracy. Tocqueville hopes that democratic nations can procure and maintain a balance between these two, at times contradictory, political tenets. As Aurelian Craiutu points out in his article, "Tocqueville's Paradoxical Moderation," "Tocqueville believed that democracy is inherently unstable and dangerous not so much because it is predicated on a constant tension between equality and liberty but because most people would seek to solve this tension in favor of equality by abandoning liberty."[183]

The following comments were also put forward in the previous chapter, but they are worth mentioning again: Tocqueville's discussion on equality and liberty and Chantal

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[180] Ibid, 689-670

[181] Ibid, 204

[182] Ibid

[183] Craiutu, Aurelian. "Tocqueville's Paradoxical Moderation." *The Review of Politics,* Vol. 67, Issue 4, 2005. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 p. 617-618

Mouffe's "democratic paradox" are strikingly similar. Indeed, it seems very odd that

Mouffe does not quote, or even cite, Tocqueville once. After all, Tocqueville really

seems to present the exact idea that Mouffe argues for in *The Democratic Paradox:* that

liberal-democracy is not "the search for an inaccessible consensus, but an agonistic

confrontation of the constitutive liberal-democratic values"[184] – i.e., equality and liberty.

Having fleshed out Tocqueville's thoughts on the relationship between equality

and liberty in democracy, it is clear that Tocqueville saw the utility of tension for politics,

and seems to incorporate an aspect of agonal theory in his democratic thought. His

accommodation of tension, however, is not limited to the relationship between equality

and liberty. Tocqueville also saw tension's benefits for democracy in the conflicts arising

from pluralism, namely in its ability to protect against the tyranny of the majority. As

mentioned in the previous chapter, in *The Return of the Political,* Chantal Mouffe states,

"a healthy democratic process calls for a vibrant clash of political positions and the open

conflict of interests."[185] The following paragraphs will emphasize that Tocqueville would

have been inclined to agree.

First, Tocqueville regards conflicting interests as inevitable in great democratic

nations. Democracy facilitates the existence of a wide-array of political opinions and

perspectives. Moreover, Tocqueville acknowledged the propensity for people to join

together with like-minded individuals. In the process of associating, the shared opinions

that brought people together in the first place will often intensify and a sort of crowd

effect seems to be in place –

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[184] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox,* 9
[185] Mouffe, *Return of the Political,* 6

the intensity of human passions is heightened not only by
the importance of the end which they propose to attain, but
by the multitude of individuals who are animated by them,
at the same time. Everyone has had occasion to remark, that
his emotions in the midst of a sympathizing crowd are far
greater than those which he would have felt in solitude.[186]

People are inclined to associate with those who profess the same opinion. And as

democracy tolerates and breeds a multiplicity of political opinions, it will accept and

encourage an abundance of political associations. Tocqueville defines an association as a

"public assent which a number of individuals give to certain doctrines; and in the

engagement which they contract to promote in a certain manner the spread of those

doctrines."[187] Associations are useful political tools as they unite and focus the efforts of

individuals, helping them to achieve an end which they mutually desire.

The unlimited right to association, however, has consequences, namely that

conflicting and competing associations will inevitably arise. In a free country with an

open right of association, "all is bustle and activity…amelioration and progress are the

topics of inquiry."[188] And while Tocqueville recognizes the convulsions that this will

produce, he accepts them as necessary for the maintenance of democracy. Tocqueville

asserts that fierce opposition among political associations "has become a necessary

guaranty against the tyranny of the majority."[189] Therefore, while the tension existing

between political associations, at worst, threatens to "throw [a] nation into anarchy," or at

least "perpetually augments the chances of that calamity,"[190] it is integral for the health of

democratic government. Tocqueville comments, "a dangerous expedient is used to

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186 Tocqueville, 126
187 Ibid, 155
188 Ibid, 206
189 Ibid, 157
190 Ibid, 157

obviate a still more formidable danger," that danger being the despotism of a faction or

solitary ruler.[191] As Craiutu points out, "Tocqueville realized that if any one set of

interests at work in society were ever allowed to reign absolutely over its rivals, the

competition between them would come to an end and society would be deprived of one

of its leading principles of social improvement."[192] It is the tension between competing

interests that allows for the advancement of democratic society. Craiutu summarizes

Tocqueville's point well:

> Social and moral progress would become impossible,
> because society would lack the necessary pluralism that
> makes political freedom possible…in order to survive and
> flourish, democratic societies must cultivate a **systematic
> antagonism** by creating the necessary conditions for a free
> competition for power between rival ideas, principles,
> forces, modes of life, and interests.[193]

Exploring his commentary on the relationship between equality and liberty, as

well as his defense of pluralism, it becomes obvious that Tocqueville admires, or at least

respects, the inevitable presence and, moreover, the potential usefulness of tension within

democracies. Towards the end of his chapter in Volume I of *Democracy in America*

entitled, "Advantages of Democracy," he admits the disadvantages that democracy may

incur because of its paradoxical, conflict-ridden, existence. Tocqueville states,

"Democratic liberty is far from accomplishing all its projects with the skill of an adroit

despotism. It frequently abandons them before they have home their fruits, or risks them

when the consequences may be dangerous."[194] But he justifies this:

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[191] Ibid, 158

[192] Craiutu, 623

[193] Ibid

[194] Tocqueville, 209

in the end, it produces more than any absolute
government…[Democracy] produces what the ablest
governments are frequently unable to create; namely, an
all-pervading and restless activity, a superabundant force,
and an energy which is inseparable from it, and which may,
however unfavorable circumstances may be, produce
wonders.[195]

Finally, Tocqueville's appreciation of conflict and tension is evident in his ideas

on moderation. Tocqueville rejects any benefits of moderation characterized by

mass floating in the middle, inert, egotistic, without energy
without patriotism, sensual, sybaritic, that has only
instincts, that lives from day to day, that becomes in turn
the plaything of all the others. Moderation without virtue
nor courage; moderation that is born from cowardice of the
heart and not from virtue, from exhaustion, from fear, from
egoism; tranquility that does not come about because you
are well-off, but because you do not have the courage and
the energy necessary to seek something better. Debasement
of souls. The passions of old men that end in impotence.[196]

Here we see that moderation, for Tocqueville, should be avoided, unless it is an

immoderate moderation, characterized by paradox and contradiction, like the moderation

he himself seems to exhibit. Throughout his political thought, as detailed by Craiutu,

"Tocqueville speaks…without offering a rigid doctrine."[197] In fact, Tocqueville's thought

seems, at times, inconsistent, even contradictory. Craiutu continues, "On one hand he is

liberal, on another conservative. He seems to adore democracy, but occasionally he

ardently defends aristocracy. Even for those who find him to be moderate, his moderation

is found to immoderately composed."[198] Thus, as Craiutu has aptly pointed out, it seems

that Tocqueville himself heeded the advice he gave to democracies; his work and his

political thought exhibit the same sorts of tension, conflict, even paradox, that he

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[195] Ibid

identifies in democracy. Herein, if one identifies Tocqueville as a "moderate," they must accept him as an agonistic one.

To summarize, Tocqueville's comments on the paradoxical relationship between equality and liberty, on the need for a multiplicity of opinions, and on moderation all emphasize how he accommodates and incorporates tension and conflict in his political thought. In this vein, he follows Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Burke, and Mill in exhibiting some of the central tenets of modern agonal theory in his political thought.

While each of the last five examples have emphasized the pervasiveness of the characteristic elements of agonal theory within and throughout modern political thought, there are also moments of significant opposition to agonal ideas in the work of other modern political thinkers. Therefore, while the task of this chapter is to note how the principles of agonal theory are appreciated throughout modern political thought, it is important to observe that such an appreciation is not universal. There are a number of modern theorists who do not accommodate, much less appreciate, notions of conflict or tension within their political thought, as the following paragraphs on Thomas Hobbes, J.J. Rousseau, and Woodrow Wilson will show.

Hobbes

The work of seventeenth century English political philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, clearly marks a moment of opposition to agonal ideas in modern political thought. Hobbes explicitly rejects pluralism and, therefore, any positive conception of tension as well. In his famous *Leviathan,* Hobbes constructs an absolutely powerful sovereign. This

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[196] Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*, found in Craiutu, 627
[197] Craiutu, 601
[198] Ibid, 602

sovereign is created when men join the social contract, conferring "all of their power and strength upon one man"[199] to escape the State of Nature. The resulting sovereign is "one person, of whose acts a great multitude, by mutual covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the author, to the end he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their peace and common defense."[200] Once it is established through the social contract, this Leviathan, according to Hobbes, exists to preserve the commonwealth by preventing civil disunion and opposition, which he sees as likely to produce civil war. The absolute sovereign will "defend [men] from … the injuries of one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort as… they may nourish themselves and live contentedly."[201] Herein, Hobbes creates his particular escape from the state of nature precisely in an effort to avoid disunion and the conflict it precipitates. Similarly, Hobbes rejects the viability of the separation of powers. In his chapter entitled "Of Those Things that Weaken, or Tend to the Dissolution of a Commonwealth," Hobbes states, "what is it to divide the power of a Commonwealth, but to dissolve it; for powers divided mutually destroy each other."[202] Therefore, Hobbes clearly rejects pluralism, and rejects tension, including tension between powers of government, even more strongly. As Rosenblum explains, "Hobbes' is a theory of sovereign absolutism in the service of a stable whole."[203] Hobbes does not accommodate any form of agonal theory in his political philosophy and represents an obvious moment of opposition to agonism in modern political thought.

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[199] Hobbes, Thomas. *Hobbes:"Leviathan"*. Eds. Richard Tuck, Raymond Geuss, and Quentin Skinner. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 109
[200] Ibid
[201] Ibid
[202] Ibid, 225
[203] Rosenblum, 31

Rousseau

Writing in 18th century France, republican Jean-Jacques Rousseau also presents a

perspective that does not accommodate any sort of pluralism or tension. His work,

therefore, clearly opposes agonal ideas. First, Rousseau "opposed any political

recognition of parts."[204] For Rousseau, only the whole is sovereign. In *A Discourse on the*

Origins of Inequality, Rousseau makes a point of saying that authority is derived from

civil society, rather than the other way around. This idea, garnered on the notion of

consent, is furthered in his *Social Contract*. In joining the social contract each man freely

"unites himself with all" on the following terms --

> each of us puts his person and all his power in common
> under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our
> corporate capacity we receive each member as an
> indivisible part of the whole.[205]

We see here that Rousseau aimed his political theory at unity. Conversely, for Rousseau,

pluralism is an abomination. This is evident in book IV of *The Social Contract,* where

Rousseau states, "when particular interest begin to make themselves felt and sectional

societies begin to exert an influence…the common interest becomes corrupted."[206]

Therefore, as Rosenblum points out in her analysis of Rousseau, "unanimity is not just an

ideal but the supreme premise of Rousseau's republicanism."[207] In rejecting pluralism,

Rousseau inherently rejects tension. The general will does not accommodate competition

between opinions or interests. Instead, it singles out one singular, commonly held opinion

and pushes that forward, coercing all to support it in executing their commitment to the

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[204] Rosenblum, 33

[205] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract.* Trans. G.D.H. Cole. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2003, Book I, chapter vi

[206] Ibid, Book IV, chapter iv

[207] Rosenblum, 34

social contract. Rousseau's twofold rejection of pluralism and tension highlights the fact

that his political theory is opposed to any notion of agonism.

Wilson

Finally, turning to a more contemporary example, American President Woodrow

Wilson provides an additional moment of opposition to agonal theory in modern political

thought. Wilson preaches an art of politics that discards the diversity of ideas and works

to unify the public towards one particular vision. In fact, Wilson rejects the

government's, as well as the people's, ability to accommodate tension. As such, he

objects to the thinking of the Founding Fathers. (As the next chapter will assert, the

Founding Father's did accommodate, and actually appreciate, tension within their

political thought and fashioned the American polity with this in mind.) Wilson claims

that "the trouble with the [Federalist] theory is that government is not a machine, but a

living thing…accountable to Darwin, not to Newton…No living thing can have its organs

offset against each other as checks, and live."[208] Wilson's progressivism, therefore,

attempted to function for unity, which he believed he could find by being concerned with

the "common" or "average" man. As W.J. Coats outlines in his chapter on Wilson in

Statesmanship,

> what we can see, then, in the achievements of Woodrow
> Wilson and the progressive movement, is the public
> endorsement and codification of the incipient changes in
> customs and manners (away from independent judgment)
> described by Cooper in 1838: the citizen of the U.S.
> democratic system is no longer to attempt to preserve the
> internal tension which arises in weighing his needs against
> those of the public authority and the common good.[209]

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[208] Coats, *Statesmanship and Party Government; a Study of Burke and Bolingbroke*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965, p. 63
[209] Ibid

Herein, Wilson seeks to take tension out of politics, emphasizing that Wilson exhibits another moment of opposition to agonal ideas within modern political thought.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed five moments of appreciation of agonal ideas from the first formal appreciation of political tension, in the 16th century, in Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy,* through his contemporaries, Montesquieu, Burke, Mill and Tocqueville, along with three moments of opposition in the thought of Hobbes, Rousseau, and President Woodrow Wilson. These efforts have emphasized that agonal theory, though not universally accepted and expounded, can be identified within modern Western political thought. From this point, this study will turn to its examination of one final moment of appreciation.

CHAPTER III
Agonistic Democracy in the United States of America

*"America historically has achieved the ultimate stability of
an arch: those very forces which are logically calculated to
drag stones to the ground actually provide props of support
– derived from a principle in which thrust and counter-
thrust become means of counterpoise."*
–Michael Kammen, *People of Paradox*

Having explored agonism, defining it, discussing its origins, and highlighting both the moments where its central ideas are tangible in the thought of mainstream modern political theorists, as well as a few moments where they are criticized, this study now turns to its final assertion – that conflict and tension lay at the heart of the American polity. Pushing this point further, it will argue that the way in which the American system accommodates, institutionalizes and appreciates tension, renders the American experiment in democracy to be, more specifically, an experiment in agonistic democracy.

As a refresher, most basically, agonism is marked by two main tenets: first, agonism acknowledges and accepts tension and conflict as inevitable facts of pluralist society. Second, agonism defends this tension and conflict as necessary, even positive, for the maintenance of democracy. This section will, therefore, take the time to defend the view that pluralism, and the dissension and debate that arise from pluralism, are, and historically have been, understood as inevitable to American democracy since its founding. The chapter will then identify how tension has been institutionalized within, and encouraged by, the American political system for the sake of maintaining popular government in the United States, and, as such, how it manifests in the modern American polity.

As stated in the earlier chapter on agonism, I am defining pluralism most basically to mean the existence, recognition, and toleration of unique, distinguishable parts that exist within a political society. The statement that American democracy is a pluralist democracy is something I've never had to defend. It has always been a given, something stated, but never cited – a hallmark of American democracy. But, for the sake of this project, I believe defending pluralism as an inherent aspect of American political society is worthwhile.

Nancy Rosenblum, in *On The Side Of The Angels,* explains that under pluralism, social and political parts are considered legitimate and are incorporated into the system of government. "Pluralism is an admitted fact of social life."[210] Moreover, as was mentioned in an earlier chapter, democratic forms of government permit and promote pluralism. Chantal Mouffe states in *The Democratic Paradox,* "pluralism of interests and values ha[s] to be acknowledged as coextensive with the very idea of 'the people.'"[211] Democracy, or government by "the people", is characterized by such a pluralism of interests and values, which manifest in a multitude of unique, distinguishable groups, associations, and parts.

But American democracy, specifically, has acknowledged and accepted pluralism as implicit to its form. Modern scholars are quick to note the pluralistic quality of American society. In his book, *People of Paradox,* Michael Kammen argues, "unstable pluralism on a scale of unprecedented proportion is especially American."[212] Truthfully, one need look no further than the Seal of the United States or the tail-side of a new

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[210] Rosenblum, 83

[211] Ibid

[212] Kammen, Michael. "People of Paradox." *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity*. Eds Ann Gostyn Serow and Everett Carl. Baltimore: Lanahan, 2000, p. 33

penny, where *"E Pluribus Unum"* is written, to see proof that pluralism is central to the American polity. *E Pluribus Unum* means "out of many, one," and represents the idea that our one country is composed of many unique parts, that the American Union exists in the context of pluralist society.

This acknowledgement and acceptance of pluralism can be easily traced back to the founding of the nation. Turning to what is viewed as one of the most informative authorities on the thought of the American founders, the *Federalist Papers* (and *Federalist 10* and *Federalist 51,* in particular), we see that that the Founding Fathers viewed pluralism, and conflict as a result, to be inevitable truths of liberal democratic politics, and thereby central to American society. In the famous *Federalist 10,* Madison states, "as long as the reason of man continues fallible, and he is at liberty to exercise it, different opinions will be formed…the diversity in the faculties of men…is not less an insuperable obstacle to an uniformity of interests."[213] Madison recognizes that "a division of the society into different interests and parties"[214] is inevitable. It is inevitable because it is inherent to mankind. Madison writes, "the latent causes of faction are thus sown in the nature of man; and we see them everywhere brought into different degrees of activity, according to the different circumstances of civil society."[215] And in *Federalist 51,* Madison identifies pluralism in the United States specifically. American society, he states, "will be broken into so many parts, interests and classes of citizens."[216]

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[213] *The Federalist Papers*. Eds. Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2006, *Federalist 10,* p. 53
[214] Ibid
[215] Ibid
[216] Ibid, Federalist 51, 290

Having recognized pluralism as inherent to democratic society generally, and American society specifically, the Founders understood that conflict, tension, and dissension, will naturally follow. As Madison articulately outlines in *Federalist 10,*

> A zeal for different opinions concerning religion, concerning government, and many other points, as well of speculation as of practice; an attachment to different leaders ambitiously contending for pre-eminence and power; or to persons of other descriptions whose fortunes have been interesting to the human passions, have, in turn, divided mankind into parties, inflamed them with mutual animosity, and rendered them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to co-operate for their common good. So strong is this propensity of mankind to fall into mutual animosities, that where no substantial occasion presents itself, the most frivolous and fanciful distinctions have been sufficient to kindle their unfriendly passions and excite their most violent conflicts.[217]

At this point, it takes little effort to recognize that James Madison, the father of the American Constitution, has outlined the first tenants of agonal theory – that pluralism is inherent to democratic political society and that conflict and tension will manifest themselves within politics as a result.

The American political system that Madison and the other Founding Fathers fashioned was designed with the fact of pluralism in mind. The Founders believed that pluralism produced the "violent conflicts" and "unfriendly passions" of faction, but they also believed that the causes of faction could not be removed. As Madison outlines, faction could only be removed through two options. The first option would be to extinguish liberty, as "liberty is to faction, what air is to fire, an aliment, without which it instantly expires."[218] But as liberty is essential to political life in a democratic state, this

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[217] Ibid, Federalist 10, 53-54
[218] Ibid, 53

is a nonviable option. The second recourse, to quell faction, would be to implement uniformity. Madison explains this as "giving to every citizen the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests."[219] But he establishes this as virtually impossible, given the aforementioned reality of pluralism. It was in this vein that the founders established that "the *causes* of faction cannot be removed."[220]

As such, in shaping the American polity, the Founders were concerned with "*controlling the effects*"[221]—the conflict, tension, and dissention – of the faction that results from pluralistic democracy, rather than removing them. While the Founding Fathers recognized that the "violent conflicts" that faction produces might "clog the administration" or "convulse the society," they understood their purpose.[222] As Madison states in *Federalist 51,* security for both civil and religious rights consists in "the multiplicity of interests, and in the …multiplicity of sects."[223] The greater the number of interests and sects, the greater the security afforded to liberty. Pluralism's removal, on the other hand, would likely threaten the public good, private rights, or the spirit and form of popular government; it would signify that a "tyranny of the majority" had come to fruition.[224] Yet, as Madison explains, a removal of pluralism and the multiplicity of interests is unlikely. After all, "the extended republic of the United States" embraces a "great variety of interests, parties, and sects."[225]

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[219] Ibid
[220] Ibid, 55
[221] Ibid, 58
[222] Ibid, 55
[223] Ibid, Federalist 51, 290
[224] Ibid, Federalist 10, 55
[225] Ibid, Federalist 51, 291

At this point one can begin to see that tension and the conflict of interests were regarded as necessary, rather than detrimental, for the protection and maintenance of the American republic, a system centered on popular government and committed to both private rights and the public good. Understanding this allows one to more fully appreciate the significance behind the statement of *Federalist 51* that "ambition must be made to counteract ambition." Every aspect of the American apparatus of government seems to have been designed with this idea in mind.

Additionally, the Founding Fathers accepted that tension and conflict could actually be remarkably positive. In *The People of Paradox,* Michael Kammen points out that upon accepting the speakership of the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1734, John Randolph remarked "that counterpointed opinions were necessary and 'of all things the most useful.'…Because 'then we shall hear one another patiently, put the Weight of every Man's Reason in the Balance against our own, and at last form a Judgment upon the whole matter.'"[226] Another example readily comes to mind. In a letter to Madison, Thomas Jefferson famously stated that under democracy men enjoy liberty and happiness, but he also explains that democratic government is laden with tension and conflict. However, while he acknowledges tension as the inevitable negative product of democracy, he recognizes and fleshes out how it can actually be quite beneficial. He states,

> It has its evils too: the principal of which is the turbulence to which it is subject…Malo periculosam, libertatem quam quietam servitutem. *Even this evil is productive of good*. It prevents the degeneracy of government, and nourishes a general attention to the public affairs. I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in

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[226]Kammen, Michael G. *People of Paradox; an Inquiry Concerning the Origins of American Civilization.* New York: Knopf, 1972, p. 93

the political world as storms in the physical. Unsuccessful
rebellions indeed generally establish the encroachments on
the rights of the people which have produced them. An
observation of this truth should render honest republican
governors so mild in their punishment of rebellions, as not
to discourage them too much. It is a medicine necessary for
the sound health of government."[227]

Jefferson accepts tension and conflict as an inevitable "evils" of democratic government.
But "even this evil is productive of good."[228] Tension, and ensuing conflicts, what
Jefferson calls "turbulence," will check government's power over the people who
constitute it, prevent encroachments of civil rights and liberties, and will ensure that
citizens stay involved in public affairs, all of which are necessary for the maintenance of
liberal democracy.

Madison, Randolph, and Jefferson, along with the Founding Generation as a
whole, seem to have recognized and put forward the second major tenet of agonism – that
tension is necessary and positive for the maintenance of democracy. And it is my main
assertion that they fashioned the American polity in a form that permitted,
institutionalized, and at times even fostered tension with this conviction in mind. As
Richard Hofstadter states in *The American Political Tradition* that the founding fathers
assumed a "Hobbesian war of each against all,"[229] in which society was characterized by
tension between competing and clashing interests. However, "they did not propose to put

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[227]Jefferson, Thomas. "A Little Rebellion...(Quotation)." Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, Paris,
January 30, 1787. *Monticello.org*

[228] Ibid

[229] Hofstadter, "The American Political Tradition." *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity.* Eds.
Ann Gostyn Serow and Everett Carl Ladd. Baltimore: Lanahan, 2000, p. 48
 --- I realize quoting Hofstadter may seem inappropriate since he is a "consensus-historian," but even he
acknowledges the presence of tension in his writings on the American polity, which emphasizes its
centrality.

an end to this war, but merely to stabilize it and make it less murderous."[230] In this effort,

tension, and dissension were thoroughly woven into the fabric of the American polity,

and remain there to this day. Having arrived at this point, the chapter will now turn to

uncovering how and where tension manifests within the American polity, focusing

primarily on its countervailing institutions, its vibrant partisan and interest group politics,

its dualistic principles, and the paradoxical character of American citizens and statesmen.

Institutions of Government

The first and most obvious place in which one can identify tension in the

American polity is in its celebrated institutions of government. Tension can be identified

in the system of federalism and in the separation of powers that characterize the structure

of the Federal government. I assert that these institutions of the American polity were

fashioned, and now function, with a profound understanding of the inevitability of

conflict and tension among interests, and the beneficial potential of such conflict and

tension. These institutions highlight that the American political system takes to heart that

"where counterpointed tendencies were inevitable, both society and polity could benefit

from healthy tensions embodied in a natural system of checks and balances."[231]

First, the system of federalism emphasizes an accommodation and appreciation of

tension within American political institutions. Federalism, as pointed out by Tocqueville,

is at its core a system of rivalry. The Constitution of 1789 devised a system that divided

sovereignty in a "complex and difficult"[232] manner. The arrangement, in which "each of

the States which had composed the Union should continue to govern itself in all that

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[230] Ibid

[231]Kammen, 93

[232] Tocqueville, 86

concerned its internal prosperity, whilst the entire nation, represented by the Union, should continue to form a compact body, and to provide for all general exigencies," was implemented as a "middle course… which brought together by force two systems theoretically irreconcilable."[233]

Tocqueville details that during the establishment of the Federal Constitution two opinions pervaded – one proposed a congress, or a league of independent states; the other advocated the union of the citizens of the colonies into one people, and established one government that would act as the sole representative of the whole nation. The system of federalism is the compromise struck between these opposing opinions, one that forced these two competing interests together, sustaining them in a manageable tension, rather than finding either interest to truly dominate or forming a precise mean between them. This is evident in Madison's words on federalism at the end of *Federalist 39* –

> The proposed Constitution, therefore, even when tested by
> the rules laid down by its antagonists, is, in strictness,
> neither a national nor a federal Constitution, but a
> composition of both. In its foundation it is federal, not
> national; in the sources from which the ordinary powers of
> the government are drawn, it is partly federal and partly
> national; in the operation of these powers, it is national, not
> federal; in the extent of them, again, it is federal, not
> national; and, finally, in the authoritative mode of
> introducing amendments, it is neither wholly federal nor
> wholly national.[234]

Therefore, as Tocqueville states, under federalism, "two sovereignties are necessarily in presence of each other,"[235] that of the States and that of the national government. They will inevitably collide and conflict over their appropriate areas of jurisdiction and

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[233] Ibid, 86, 89
[234] *The Federalist Papers*, Federalist 39, 215
[235] Tocqueville, 86

authority. (In fact, Tocqueville sees these contests as one of the principal reasons for creating the Supreme Court, as one of its duties is "to maintain the balance of power between the two rival governments, as it had been established by the constitution."[236])

But despite this unavoidable conflict, the contentious arrangement established by the system of federalism "has not hitherto produced those evils which might have been feared."[237] Obviously, how the system has precisely worked has shifted over the years, as seen through shifts between what political scientists label as dual, "layer-cake," federalism and cooperative, "marble-cake," federalism. However, this only further emphasizes how the system of federalism institutionalizes the tension between state and national interests, and makes it navigable, which, in turn, helps maintain and stabilize American democracy.

Second, the structure of the Federal government also emphasizes that tension is accommodated and appreciated within the institutions of American democracy. Through the separation of powers, and the checks and balances of the government's tripartite structure, tension and conflict inevitably arise between the branches of the federal government. In addition, tension can be identified within the branches themselves – especially the legislative branch, although perhaps the judicial branch to a lesser degree as well. The following paragraphs will explain both of these statements in order to underscore how an accommodation and appreciation of tension is central to the structure and institutions of American government.

Madison opens *Federalist 51* by explaining the purpose behind the separation of powers. He states, "by so contriving the interior structure of the government as that its

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[236] Ibid, 86-87
[237] Ibid, 89

several constituent parts may, by their mutual relations, be the means of keeping each other in their proper places,"[238] an appropriate distribution of power may be maintained. The Founders "feared concentration of powers in a single branch."[239] Moreover, they were concerned that federal power would become too strong and would come to infringe on individual liberties. The Constitution, therefore, was designed so that each branch – the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary – would have "a will of its own"[240] and that the will of each would thwart that of the others. One can identify the origins of the branches' wills in the Constitution's Articles I, II, and III which outline each branch's specific powers. Through this system of rivalry, not only would one branch be prevented from growing too strong, but the entire government would be reined in so that it did not infringe on the liberty of the people. Ultimately, therefore, what the Founders sought to do was to place internal checks on government and its power for an appropriate balance of power and the maintenance of liberty under American democracy. Tension and conflict between the branches constituted such a check.

But how do these tensions actually manifest? All legislative powers are granted to the United States Congress in Article I of the Constitution; as outlined by Article II, executive powers go to the President; Article III specifies that judicial powers are reserved for the Supreme Court, and the judicial system under it. This formal distribution of power and authority make the three branches seem very distinct. However, the authors of the Constitution also included a significant number of checks through which the branches inhibit each other's primary function. Through these the branches begin to

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[238] *The Federalist Papers*, Federalist 51, 287

[239] Epstein, Lee and Thomas G. Walker. *Constitutional Law for a Changing America.* Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1992, p. 10

[240] Ibid

collide. Examples include the President's ability to veto legislation, Congress' ability to override such a veto, the requirement, under Article II, Section 2, of Senate advice and consent of Presidential appointments, Senate ratification of treaties, the Judiciary's ability to strike down laws as unconstitutional, Congress' ability to put forward new constitutional amendments, the list continues. What all of these emphasize is that, while the branches are distinct, they do not operate in isolation; the Constitution makes that impossible. And it is in these constitutionally established contact zones, where the branches interact, that tension manifests.[241]

In *Democracy in America,* Tocqueville notes the tension that arises through the separation of powers. He explains that the different branches of the federal government, namely the legislature and the executive are often at odds. For instance, later in the chapter, "The Federal Constitution," in discussing the role of the Supreme Court, Tocqueville remarks that "the executive" will turn to the Courts "for assistance against the encroachments of the legislative power," and the "Legislature demands" the Court's "protection against the assaults of the Executive."[242] A modern example may help to emphasize how tension arises between branches. The 2014 Supreme Court case *National Labor Relations Board v. Noel Canning,* 573 U.S. ___ (2014) was, most basically, a dispute between the legislative and executive branches. In this particular case, Congress and the President were at odds over the President's power to make recess appointments. President Obama made four appointments during the 2011-2012 Holiday recess, claiming his authority to do so under the recess appointments clause. Congress, Senate

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[241] This paragraph is written based on my studies of U.S. Government, but was especially informed by my coursework in GOV 335 with Professor Mitchell, as well as the textbook from that course, Epstein and Walker's, *Constitutional Law for a Changing America.*
[242]Tocqueville, 117

Republicans in particular, held that President Obama had exceeded the constitutional

authority given to him under the recess appointments clause, as the appointments were

made while the Senate was holding *pro forma* sessions every three days (most likely in

an effort to prevent the President making any recess appointments). Therefore, while the

case involved a much more complex and intricate set of facts, it was, at its core, really

about friction between the legislative and executive branches. As Justice Scalia stated in

his concurring opinion, "this issue has been the subject of a long-simmering inter-branch

conflict."[243]

Ultimately, as Epstein and Walker assert in their chapter on the separation of

powers in *Constitutional Law for a Changing America,* the Framers structured the federal

government to achieve some sort of balanced government through the friction between

the three branches of government. However, the conflicts and struggles for power

between branches all occur within in the constitutional framework, an agreed upon

system and set of procedures. As such, the multitude of checks and balances between the

branches allow conflict to wage on within the Federal government without threatening to

dissolve it altogether. I believe this arrangement seems quite akin to Chantal Mouffe's

statement in *The Democratic Paradox* that, under agonal theory, conflict should only

"take place within a social framework that allows those in conflict to envision themselves

as part of a shared order, even as they are encouraged to contest this same order. Thus

conflict "needs to take a form that does not destroy the political association.""[244] Under

the arrangement of the separation of powers, the three branches of the U.S. federal

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[243]*National Labor Relations Board v. Noel Canning,* 573 U.S. ___ (2014). Scalia, A, concurring in judgement, 47.

[244] Wingenbach, Edward C. *Institutionalizing Agonistic Democracy Post-Foundationalism and Political Liberalism.* Burlington, VT.: Ashgate, 201., p. 34

government all exist within an agreed upon social framework. But, as evidenced by the *NLRB v. Noel Canning* case, they continually debate and contest this order.

Tension is not only tangible among the branches, but within the branches as well. For instance, tension is evident within the legislative branch, between the Senate and the House of Representatives. As Michael Kammen outlines in *People of Paradox,* "The Founders created a bicameral body so that it would expressly embrace contradictions. The House was dedicated to the propositions of majority rule, and the Senate to the sacredness of minority rights."[245] The Senate was composed to favor the principle of the independence of the states, as each state was allotted two representatives, regardless of population or size. The House, on the other hand, was formed with the sovereignty of the whole nation in mind, as representation in that chamber is proportional to population. And, as Alexis de Tocqueville states in *Democracy in America*, given this inconsistency, "the minority of the nation in the Senate may paralyze the decisions of the majority represented in the other House,"[246] emphasizing that relations between the two chambers may not always be harmonious.

Similar statements about discord could be made regarding the judicial branch. The Supreme Court is not composed of nine identically thinking jurors. Instead, its members, its operations, and even its decisions are marked by difference, dissension, and debate. Similarly, if one looks beyond the Supreme Court, at the judiciary as a whole, there is hardly unanimity. For instance, there was incredible division among lower court rulings on "gay marriage" up until 2014, division that highlights that tension and dissension are evident within the judicial branch. Additionally, the fact that the judiciary has the means

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[245] Kammen, 280
[246] Tocqueville, 117

to alleviate this tension – an ultimate decision from the Supreme Court – does not mean that the tension among divergent rulings, various legal arguments, or conflicting philosophies of constitutional interpretation, is permanently quelled. It simply indicates that the multitude of conflicting legal opinions within the United States exist within a set framework to which they all agree implicitly. Their discord is institutionalized, but it is discord nonetheless. Obviously, the executive branch does not exhibit internal tensions to the same extent as the legislative or judicial branch. But this is to be expected, as the Executive Branch is under the more unilateral authority of the President.

Having emphasized that tension exists both among the three branches of the federal government, and within the legislative and judicial branches themselves, it can be logically concluded that, ultimately, these tensions are beneficial for American government on the whole. The presence of tension among and within the branches indicates that a multiplicity of interests is present in government, that no one branch, chamber, party, group, or person, dominate, and, therefore, that power is not overly consolidated and abused. Further, it may help to prevent the subjugation of individual freedoms to federal authority.

Additionally, sustained tension among and within the branches of government gives the federal government an adaptable nature; the constant "back and forth" allows for the balance of power to shift, provided that this is accomplished within an agreed upon framework. For instance, as history suggests, at times when national security seems threatened, power may pull in the direction of the President and his executive branch. In times of peace, however, the legislative branch may fight to reclaim power and authority. At the same time as they make it adaptable, the tensions that are central to the structure

and organization of American government can prevent such changes from happening too quickly, too rashly, or too permanently. Again, as Madison explained in *Federalist 51,* "the several constituent parts may, by their mutual relations, be the means of keeping each other in their proper places."[247] Therefore, the tensions produced by the separation of powers, which characterize the federal government, seem to secure a remarkable balance of temperate adaptability that will allow the United States government to move forward through a changing world while always retaining levels of stability. This institutionalized tension, therefore, appears to give American democracy both a sense of vitality and a shot at longevity, which harkens back to Machiavelli's statement that the stability and longevity of the Roman republic was a product of the tension existing between the Senate and the people, and that it was this that kept the republic free, and allowed it to avoid stagnancy and delay decay.

The tangible presence and appreciation of tension in the American institutions of federalism and the separations of powers emphasize the more agonal aspects of American government. Agonists believe that the task of politics is to channel tension and conflict through institutions and processes that serve as "a political outlet within a pluralistic democratic system."[248] As the above paragraphs show, the institutions of federalism and the separation of powers do just that. Both federalism and the separation of powers doctrine carve out a place for contest and dissent within the apparatus of government. This, agonists like Mouffe argue, is "vital for a pluralist democracy."[249] Moreover, American institutions of government work to foster unity, but do so in contexts of

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[247] *The Federalist Papers*, Federalist 51, 287
[248] Mouffe, *Return of the Political,* 5
[249] Ibid, *The Democratic Paradox,* 105

conflict and diversity.[250] Compromises in American politics occur when facilitated through these institutions, but these compromises are simply "temporary respites in an ongoing confrontation,"[251] an eternal confrontation that is acknowledged and sustained because it is regarded to be (at least) inevitable and (at most) beneficial for American Government.

Party and Interest Group Politics

American party and interest group politics also emphasize that the American polity features and respects tension within politics. Political parties and interest groups are at the center of American political processes, from elections, to law making. In *Democracy in America,* Tocqueville notes the seemingly perpetual tension between the various competing parties and interests groups that exist under American democratic pluralism. Tocqueville states, "In America, the liberty of association for political purposes is unlimited."[252] And his comments on the advantages of the contests that arise from pluralism in democracies, generally, which were explored in the previous chapter, clearly hold true when discussing American democracy, specifically.

In noting the vast number of political interests that vibrant pluralism produces in America, Tocqueville states, "No sooner do you set foot upon American ground, than you are stunned by a kind of tumult; a confused clamor is heard on every side; and a thousand simultaneous voices demand the satisfaction of their social wants. Everything is in motion around you."[253] As described, the Americans seem to be the opposite of the "flock of timid and industrious animals" that the people would compose under "soft

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[250] Ibid, 102
[251] Ibid
[252] Tocqueville, 156
[253] Tocqueville, 207

despotism." Moreover, Tocqueville notes, "the unrestrained liberty of political association has not hitherto produced, in the United States, the fatal results, which might be expected."[254]

Undoubtedly, both the two-party system and interest group politics generally are marked by constant rivalry and discord. Partisan and interest group politics allow the multitude of interests that exist in American society to consolidate and be expressed with efficiency and strength. But they also provide a more formal setting, which allows the warring opinions of the American electorate to rage in a controlled fashion. To see this one only need look at national elections. Every four years, the American voting population divides into (typically) two groups, divided along party lines, which, as two scholars comment, "fight a word battle for control of the government."[255] Following this "war of opinion,"[256] power is handed to the victor peacefully. Therefore, parties and interest groups, as well as their contests, emphasize that there is tension between political ideas and policy preferences, but that this tension plays out in a systemized process; it is another example of the idea behind 'ambition to counteract ambition.' Thus, one can recognize party and interest group politics as an additional accommodation and appreciation of tension within American Government.

Political Principles

Having looked at formal, concrete institutions of American government, as well as party and interest group politics, I will now turn to identifying tension within a more abstract arena – American political principles. Louis Hartz states in his book, *The Liberal*

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[254] Tocqueville, 171

[255] Jefferson, Thomas. "Diversity and Unity." *Western Political Heritage.* Eds. Elliot, William and Neil McDonald. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1949, 897

[256] Ibid

Tradition in America, "American political thought, as we have seen, is a veritable maze of polar contradictions, winding in and out of each other hopelessly."[257] Hartz identifies a number of competing principles. These include "pragmatism and absolutism, historicism, and rationalism, optimism and pessimism, materialism and idealism, individualism and conformism."[258] Hartz is not alone in recognizing the often contradictory nature of American political principles. Michael Kammen in *The People of Paradox* quotes Erik H. Erikson, a prominent psychoanalyst, who says, "it is a commonplace to state that whatever one may come to consider a truly American trait can be shown to have its equally characteristic opposite."[259] Kammen considers American domestic political values to be dualistic in nature. He states, "we are comfortable believing in both majority rule and minority rights, in both consensus and freedom, federalism and centralization…Americans have managed to be both puritanical and hedonistic, idealistic and materialistic, peace-loving and war-mongering, isolationist and interventionist, conformist and individualist, consensus-minded and conflict-prone."[260] But just as Kammen clarifies, Americans political culture does not just accommodate these polarities by adopting some sort of mean between them. Instead, as Kammen points out, "It may be perfectly reasonable to support majority rule with reservations, or minority rights with certain other reservations. But this has not been our method. Rather, we have tended to hold contradictory ideas in suspension."[261] I agree with the authors I've quoted above.

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[257]Hartz, Louis. "The Liberal Tradition in America." *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity.* Eds. Ann Gostyn Serow and Everett Carl Ladd. Baltimore: Lanahan, 2000, p. 16
[258] Ibid
[259] Kammen, 97
[260] Kammen in *Lanahan Readings,* 31
[261] Ibid

These tensions, and the resulting paradoxes that appear in American political thought, seem to be an actualization of something akin to Chantal Mouffe's "democratic paradox," discussed in the earlier chapter on agonism. The American form of political society is one whose precise "specificity comes from the articulation between"[262] various pairings of distinct, sometimes opposing, traditions. I agree with both Mouffe and Tocqueville that one of the most obvious examples is the pairing of democratic equality and liberty within the American political tradition.

Richard Hofstadter points out in *The American Political Tradition* that "modern American folklore assumes that democracy and liberty are all but identical, and when democratic writers take the trouble to make the distinction, they usually assume that democracy is necessary to liberty."[263] Both the principle of democracy and the principle of liberty are undoubtedly are at the backbone of American political thought, but as Tocqueville and Mouffe have indicated, democracy, which emphasizes equality, and liberty, which emphasizes freedom, are not the same and, in fact, often reside in contrast to one another.

This tension between the political principles of equality and liberty manifests itself in many modern political debates. For instance, take campaign finance – Those who ascribe more value to the political principle of equality are inclined to see the negatives of big money and politics. They will point out that it biases the political process to favor the rich, allowing them to exert greater influence over elections and the political process. They will say it undermines true popular sovereignty and, therefore, democracy. On the other side, some favor the notion of liberty. These voices may expound the importance of

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262 Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox,* 2-3
263 Hofstadter, 45

first amendment rights and of people's freedom to put their resources (read: money) towards causes (read: candidates) as they wish. As such, to this day, the political principles of equality and liberty can lead Americans to vastly different policy positions, despite both values being integral to the other's existence and at the core of American democracy.

Other contradicting principles have similar effects, placing Americans on opposing sides of political debates. At times, this division may make the country slow to act. But, as Michael Kammen outlines, "our experience with polarities provides us with the potential for flexibility and diversity."[264] The dualistic nature of American political principles emphasizes how important tension and opposition are to American society. Tension transcends America's political superstructures and can be found in the subterranean depths of American society in the dualistic principles and values that constitute the American *psyche.*

Individual Statesmen and Citizens

Additionally, while tension is evident in the American psyche in a broad, nation-wide sense, tension can also appear in the *psyche* of individual Americans. Coats asserts in "A Theory of Republican Character" that republican character is characterized by an uneasy tension. He states, "the distinctive characteristic of this personality is the attempt at a commonsensical balance between those extremes which are inescapable."[265] Applying this idea to the American example, I assert that American character,[266] as a specific form of republican character, is definitely distinguished by the presence of

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[264] Kammen in *Lanahan Readings*, 33

[265]Coats, Wendell John Jr,. *A Theory of Republican Character* , p. 58 n. 91

[266] Throughout this section, I will be taking character, as Coats does, to mean "a pattern of fairly settled perspectives, habits, and characteristics in individuals, itself the outcome of some combination of upbringing, education, experience, and self-motivation." (Coats, *A Theory of Republican Character,* 15)

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tension. Moreover, I agree with Coats that the distinctive characteristic of Americans'

personality is their attempts at a balance between extremes which are unavoidable,

although I doubt that the balance they procure will always be commonsensical. After all,

as two writers observed, "it is characteristic of the American mind to hold contradictory

ideas without bothering to resolve the conflicts between them."[267]

In the United States, as outlined above, tension is "institutionalized in a

fundamental law"[268] in political practices, and, moreover, is a distinguishing feature of

American political thought. It's hardly surprising, therefore, that tension characterizes

American citizens. However, as Michael Kammen points out, "conflicts *between*

Americans have been visible for a very long time, but most of us are just beginning to

perceive the conflicts *within* us individually."[269]

First looking at average American citizens, a state of tension clearly marks their

character. This state of tension emerges from their attempts to maintain "a healthy tension

among the poles or dimensions of various intersecting axes,"[270] for instance, between

what one deems to be best for the "public good" and one's own private interests. Ideally,

these two are synonymous, but that may not always be the case. Additionally, tension

may arise between the goal of self-reliance, or autonomy, and duty of being actively

invested in politics and focused on community. A few more contradictions come to mind:

American citizens are asked to honor tradition, but urge on progress; protect and promote

their own beliefs, while never attacking anyone else's. Michael Kammen outlines a few

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[267] Cronin, Thomas and Michael Genovese. "The Paradoxes of the American Presidency." *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity.* Eds. Ann Gostyn Serow and Everett Carl Ladd. Baltimore: Lanahan, 2000, p. 214

[268] Coats, *A Theory of Republican Character,* 39

[269] Kammen in *Lanahan Readings*, 33

[270] Coats, *A Theory of Republican Character,* 39

other tensions that American individuals accommodate or feature. He names, "a large cluster of biformities," including, "the conservative liberalism of our political life, the pragmatic idealism of our cerebral life, the emotional rationalism of our spiritual life, and godly materialism of our acquisitive life."[271]

"Moderate" citizens may be characterized by an even greater accommodation or appreciation of tension. Both David Brooks and former Senator Olympia Snowe, who write to summon the "silent majority" (i.e. moderates) to help mitigate political polarization and the ensuing gridlock (which will be discussed in this study's conclusion), put forward an idea that proper moderates will be individual political actors who successfully accommodate, even internalize, political tension. Brooks and Snowe are, therefore, calling moderates to action because of their unique ability to accommodate the contentious disputes that divide our political system and facilitate a balance capable of overcoming political stagnation.

As was mentioned in the Introduction, in one of his "op-ed" pieces in the *New York Times*, entitled "What Moderation Means," Brooks states, "in most great arguments, there are two partially true points of view, which sit in tension. The moderate tries to maintain a rough proportion between them, to keep her country along its historic trajectory."[272] Brooks' moderate is impressive. His moderate is able to "preserve the tradition of conflict, keeping the opposing sides balanced."[273] The moderate can successfully maintain a balance among the many things that Brooks identifies, (as I have,) as lying in opposition within modern American democracy - equality vs.

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[271] Kammen, 116
[272] Brooks, "What Moderation Means"
[273] Ibid

achievement; centralization vs. decentralization; order and community vs. liberty and individualism; individual opportunity vs. social cohesion; local rights vs. federal power. Brooks goes on to clarify that "being moderate does not mean being tepid…The best moderates can smash partisan categories and be hard-charging in two directions simultaneously."[274] Certainly this marks an agonistic conception of moderation. Olympia Snowe puts forth a similar description of an ideal "moderate" in her book *Fighting for Common Ground.* Snowe, who extensively quotes Brooks in her chapter on moderation, adds that "moderates" have a "willingness to live with a compromise, even if it includes policies they disagree with, if it facilitates the passage of legislation that ultimately will move the country forward."[275] It is the moderate's responsibility, therefore, to bridge the gap between policies, and to accommodate the tensions that exist between them. Moreover, there is historical precedent for this sort of agonistic moderation. As explained by Hofstadter, the Founding Fathers had an image of themselves as "moderate republicans, standing between political extremes."[276]

Having mentioned the Founding Fathers, the first American statesmen, it is important to note that it is perhaps American statesmen who are the individuals most characterized by tension in the United States. To clarify, I am using the term "statesmen" to simply describe preeminent politicians or public officials. American statesmen must balance the polarities and paradoxes that citizens confront, albeit they must balance these to a different, perhaps greater, extent. Instead of merely balancing the "public good" with their own private interests, they are asked to balance the warring private interests of

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[274] Ibid

[275] Snowe, Olympia J. *Fighting for Common Ground: How We Can Fix the Stalemate in Congress.* New York: Weinstein, 201, p. 232

[276] Hofstadter, 20

others to somehow secure the greatest amount of possible good for the public. American statesman must also, like Brooks' and Snowe's "moderates," find a way to facilitate equilibrium or compromise between adverse policy positions and to transform politics and debate into policy and action.

Additionally, statesmen must embrace and exhibit qualities that often are paradoxical or contradictory. As Michael Kammen states in *People of Paradox,* "Americans expect their heroes to be Everyman and Superman simultaneously."[277] Kammen also outlines that American heroes, which I'll deem to include those whom I'm calling statesmen, must be virtuous, but also capable of necessary evil. "The quintessential American hero wears both a halo *and* horns."[278] In this vein, the American statesman may be called to evoke some Machiavellian characteristics; they need be both fox and lion, both feared and loved.

Thomas Cronin and Michael Genovese's comments in *The Paradoxes of the American Presidency* also emphasize the contradictions and tensions, which characterize the qualities of American statesmanship. (Admittedly, I'm assuming that American presidents qualify as American statesmen and that Cronin and Genovese's words on presidents can be applied to statesmen more broadly). Cronin and Genovese describe the American presidency as a "complex, multidimensional, even contradictory institution."[279] But they also assert that it is essential to American government. Most basically, they understand the presidency "as a series of paradoxes, clashing expectations, and

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[277] Kammen in *Lanahan Readings*, 31
[278] Ibid
[279] Cronin & Genovese, 213

contradictions."[280] As I've stated above, I believe these comments can be extended to the broader category of American statesmen, rather than just presidents. To turn again to the words of Cronin and Genovese,

> In the United States, "leaders live with contradictions …Leadership situations commonly require successive displays of contrary or divergent forces. Living with, even embracing, contradictions is a sign of political and personal maturity. The effective leader understands the presence of opposites. The aware leader, much like a first-rate conductor, knows when to bring in various sections, knows when and how to turn the volume up and down, and learns how to balance opposing sections to achieve desired results."[281]

Moreover, statesmen must embody characteristics that appear at ends to gain the trust, and the votes, of the American people. The need to embody contradictory qualities is surely facilitated by pluralism. The multiplicity of opinions and interests present in the United States makes for equally abundant and diverse expectations of our leaders. For instance, Cronin and Genovese outline nine paradoxes that statesmen, presidents specifically, must incorporate in their public personhood. They are as follows:

First, they are to be powerful and effective, capable of solving the nation's most critical dilemmas, yet are to be limited by law and unable to infringe on individual liberty or to become a tyrant. Second, they must exhibit democratic, average, behavior, while still being uncommonly heroic. This reckons back to the quote by Michael Kammen cited earlier that American heroes must be "Everyman and Superman simultaneously."[282] Third, they must be empathetic and compassionate at times, but at other times ruthless and tough. Fourth, they must appear above petty politics, yet be able to successfully

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[280] Ibid

[281] Ibid

[282] Kammen in *Lanahan Readings*, 31

navigate the political, and partisan, system, which they head. The fifth, similar to the fourth, they are to be a unifying force, while also serving as head of their political party and advocating for its policies. Sixth, they are to be idealistic and to operate in universals, yet pragmatic and programmatic. Seventh, they must be confident, but certainly not arrogant; they must be self-assured, yet humble. Eighth, the qualities needed to get elected and those needed to govern may, in fact, be different. The ninth and final paradox presented by Cronin and Genovese calls back to the first – it is the idea that they must be at times strong, at others weak; preferably, they will appear to be both.

Having fleshed through all of Cronin and Genovese's paradoxes and discussed the other tensions that statesmen must accommodate, one can truly appreciate how sustained tensions characterize American statesmen. In *A Theory of Republican Character,* Coats says of his "republican character," "on this reading, then, the human condition is a manageable tension at its best, susceptible to only intermittent moments of resolution."[283] The above paragraphs emphasize that this thought accurately describes the character of American citizens, and moderates and statesmen in particular. As Kammen states in *People of Paradox,* "in the United States, the human condition – which is everywhere paradoxical to be sure – has been given unusual freedom to vacillate permissively between possible poles."[284] This understanding emphasizes that the paradoxical character of American citizens and statesmen is a manifestation of the larger theme of tension and conflict that is woven throughout the American Polity.

Having explored how and where tension appears in the United States' countervailing institutions of federalism and the separation of powers, in its vibrant

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[283] Coats, *Theory of Republican Character,* 39, n. 91
[284] Kammen, 108

partisan and interest group politics, in its dualistic political principles, and in the paradoxical character of its citizens and statesmen, it is not difficult to understand statements like that made by Italian author Raoul Romoli-Venturi, who Kammen quotes as saying, "all the tensions of the world have been imported by the United States."[285] Tension is an essential element of democracy in America. Understanding this is generally useful as it allows one to begin to "tie together all the themes and facts in American Government,"[286] which may often seem inconsistent and paradoxical. But it is especially helpful for this study, as it emphasizes that the American experiment in democracy features agonistic qualities.

First, American democracy can be identified as agonistic in that it embraces pluralism as inevitable and accepts that tension, discord, conflict, and paradox will arise from pluralism. Moreover, the American polity espouses this tension, treating it as necessary, even positive, for the maintenance of democracy. To again borrow words from Coats, the stability of the American mixed republic "resides in the equilibrium between opposing forces – between dependence and independence, order and liberty, energy and stability, ambition and ambition, duty and interest, branches of government, the militia and the regular army, principles of proportional and equal representation, commerce and agriculture, differing commercial interests, religious denominations, and so on."[287] While this study has only addressed a few of the opposing forces listed above, the examples it has explored emphasize that tension is by no means treated as negative in the American case; American democracy does not eschew tension. Rather, as this chapter has shown,

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[285] Kammen, 112

[286] Kammen in *Lanahan Readings*, 30

[287] Coats, *Theory of Republican Character*, 28

the American system institutionalizes tension, conflict, and contradiction in its establishments, traditions, principles, and people.

The notion of institutionalizing tension reinforces the identification of the American experiment in democracy as notably agonistic. In his book *Institutionalizing Agonistic Democracy,* Ed Wingenbach states, "agonistic democrats embrace the need for a political order within which conflict can occur in a sustainable and contingently legitimated fashion."[288] He juxtaposes this with other radical democrats, who denounce the political utility of formal institutions. Agonal theory accepts and appreciates tension, but only to the extent that it can exist within the confines of an established system. Agonal theory believes that tension can be beneficial when it is institutionalized because it can then "transform as much as possible the violence engendered by either anarchy or exclusion into forces that productively inform democratic decision-making."[289] The Founding Fathers, as Richard Hofstadter points out, saw democracy as a transitional stage of government.[290] They believed it was apt to evolve into either anarchy or tyranny. They designed the American mixed regime, therefore, to channel the energies, which could lead the country towards anarchy or tyranny, into the democratic process instead, giving it a stable, yet raw, energetic vitality. As a result, and as this chapter has exposed, conflict, opposition, and paradox are tangible throughout the American polity to this very day.

A final point helps to reaffirm American democracy as agonistic. Consensus can, and must, exist in America. Moreover, although recent events suggest otherwise,

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288 Wingenbach, 22
289 Ibid, 24
290 Hofstadter, 46

generally it is sought after in America, especially in times of crisis. However, consensus is acknowledged to be temporary and fleeting. Consensus may be reached on one provision of one piece of legislation, on one broader policy, on one aspect of the relationship between the branches, on the existence of one political principle, or on one idea that is judged to be in the interest of the "common good". But consensus is never universal or permanent. Moreover, consensus is not the ultimate goal of all American politics. Rather, consensus is simply momentary agreement or compromise that results from the process of politics. The ultimate goal of politics would seem then to be more politics, because the continuation of political activity represents the survival of the political system and of democracy as well.

The preceding three paragraphs explain the claim made in the introduction to this chapter that the American experiment in democracy is, more specifically, an experiment in agonistic democracy. This fact makes a good deal of sense when one considers that the Founding Fathers, and the nation they fashioned, were greatly influenced by the thinkers discussed in the second chapter. Therefore, having concluded by restating the claim that this chapter sought to defend, I'll close this chapter with the words of one of the writers that greatly informed this chapter of my study, Michael Kammen, who provides a beautiful description of the agonal quality of American democracy: "America historically has achieved the ultimate stability of an arch: those very forces which are logically calculated to drag stones to the ground actually provides props of support – derived from a principle in which thrust and counter-thrust become means of counterpoise."[291]

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[291] Kammen, 297

CONCLUSION
The State of Disunion[292]

*"Every difference of opinion is not a difference of
principle. We have called by different names brethren of
the same principle. We are all Republicans. We are all
Federalists."*
–Thomas Jefferson, First Inaugural Address

For two centuries in the United States of America, tension appears to have accomplished that which Machiavelli, Mouffe, and others believe it is capable of. Over its 239-year lifespan, the American republic has been marked by vitality, stability, and has had a sense that it would outlast time, with one notable exception – the Civil War. During the Civil War, the tensions, conflicts, and paradoxes that characterize the United States' government, principles, and people, morphed from what Mouffe deems agonistic into what she deems antagonistic; in other words, tensions shifted from being struggles or competitions between opponents to being, quite literally, violent fights between mortal enemies. Herein, rather than providing the United States with vitality and stability, tension threatened to tear the republic apart. That moment of history prompts one to harken back to Machiavelli's warning that, although tension provides vitality and longevity, it also will eventually destroy a republic.

The Civil War, when tensions threatened to destroy the republic, marked the first time that the United States experienced a full on confrontation of the problem of maintaining the stability of its ideas and institutions. The Civil War, therefore, constituted what J.G.A Pocock calls a "Machiavellian Moment." This signifies a moment in the life of a republic when it realizes that it too is mortal. Pocock describes a "Machiavellian Moment" as "the moment in conceptualized time in which the republic was seen as

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[292] The phrase "State of Disunion" is borrowed from Ethan Underhill, with thanks.

confronting its own temporal finitude, as attempting to remain morally and politically stable in a stream of irrational events conceived as essentially destructive of all systems of secular stability."[293] The Civil War certainly brought the United States to its knees and forced it to recognize its own mortality. This is evident in what are, perhaps, the most famous words of this era – the words of the Gettysburg Address. In the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln stated that the great task before the United states was to experience "a new birth of freedom" to ensure "that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."[294] This implies a recognition that "government of the people, by the people, for the people," i.e. American democracy, was deemed to be at risk of perishing. Herein, the Civil War, the moment in United States history when tension escalated to a point where it threatened to destroy the republic, constituted America's first "Machiavellian Moment." The question is whether we're approaching another.

In the years following the Civil War, particularly in the wake of both World Wars, the United States seemed to have forgotten, or at least ignored, its mortality once more. For the larger part of the twentieth century, American democracy appeared to consider itself almost timeless, protected by Providence, and even, at the most extreme, to be a millennialist realization. However, today such an outlook does not seem to be overwhelmingly, or obviously, apparent. I do not mean to imply that America fully accepts, much less understands, its own mortality. But if one were to naively ask a roomful of my peers whether they believed the United States was immortal, they would likely hear a chorus of "No's" or, at least, an ominous silence. Our own mortality, as a

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[293] Pocock, viii

[294] Lincoln, Abraham. "The Gettysburg Address." *The Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln.* Eds. John G. Nicolay and John Hay. New York: Tany-Thomas Co., 1905

nation, does not seem to be staring us in the face as it did during the Civil War, but it does seem to be lurking in the shadows of this American life.

There appears to be a notable concern for the current state, and the future, of the American republic. And at the core of this concern is a worry over the current nature of the tension ingrained in American political society. In other words, there is concern about the state of our agonistic democracy. Has the nature of the tension central to the American republic changed? And if so how?

I believe that at the hand of polarization, the nature of the tension within the American polity *is* changing. Presently, American politics are housed in the extremes. This means that the tensions that lay at the heart of political society in the United States have become more pronounced. As I see it, polarization takes agonal politics – characterized by conflict and dissension between adversaries – and turns them into an antagonistic politics, in which others are now enemies. Why is this? There have always been divisions within the United States. What about today's modern polarized climate makes them so stark?

My suggestion is that perhaps the political phenomenon of polarization signifies a broader trend, a trend in which Americans no longer universally honor the same principles or ends of government. It has been observed that for the majority of United States history – the Civil War era excluded – American citizens, and their statesmen, venerated a single set of principles, along with institutions that functioned for these principles. As discussed in the last chapter, some of the principles contradict each other. Nonetheless, it appeared as though the majority of the American populace believed in and accommodated all these principles, and willingly navigated and negotiated their

paradoxes. Dissension and debate, therefore, centered around which policies would best

bring about the realization of these universal principles. American politics was Mouffe's

'conflictual consensus' come to life; there was a general agreement on what 'ethico-

political principles' were – say liberty and equality – but disagreement "concerning the

meaning and implementation of those principles."[295] Moreover, there was a sense that

opposition was legitimate, and a willingness to continue forward with the opposition in a

mutual struggle. Now, however, it seems that one side of the populace favors one set of

principles and the other favors another. Dissension and debate have, therefore, become

centered on advocating for one set of principles, while discrediting the other. Moreover,

there is a pervasive sense that opposition is illegitimate, and sometimes not worthy

enough to engage with.

      Thomas Jefferson remarked in his First Inaugural Address, "every difference of

opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the

same principle. We are all Republicans. We are all Federalists."[296] It seems that the

sentiment behind this statement is beginning to hold true no longer. Rather than a state of

union characterized by conflict, dissension, and the maintenance of a reasonable tension,

which provides activity, vitality, and a continuation of a mutual struggle among

competing values and interests, the United States seems to be in a state of disunion,

characterized by the development of an obstinate rift that produces stagnation,

enervation, and a refusal to engage with opposition. It is a reasonable concern, therefore,

that (as Machiavelli warned) the tensions which once made us stable and provided

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[295] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox,* 102
[296] Jefferson, "Diversity and Unity," 898

vitality and longevity, could be undermining our republic and slowly leading it towards its second "Machiavellian Moment."

The underlying goal of this study, therefore, was to explore the contemporary theory of agonism, and preceding appreciations of political tension, in the hopes of better understanding the American polity and its current ailments. Perhaps this goal stems from the idea that you must diagnose and unravel problems before you can fix them. A thorough examination of agonal theory and previous moments of, and opposition to, agonistic ideas allows one to understand when political conflict can procure political health and when it cannot. It leads one to the conclusion that, so long as the United States remains in an internal, quasi-"cold-war" over what its political principles truly are, it will struggle to move forward through history, it will lack energy and vitality, and its longevity will be threatened. For political tension to once more produce positive effects, it must shift back from being *antagonistic* in nature, to being *agonistic*. This, I believe, can be accomplished. Therefore, while this study opened with a melancholy statement, it will close with an optimistic one – Political tension can once again provide political health when we, as a nation, recommit, at some general level, to be "brethren of the same principle."

Surely, such a recommitment will take a significant push, perhaps one engendered by the nation as a whole. Claiming to know how to initiate or execute such a push would be naïve. Perhaps, however, it starts by asking questions that ask us to look at the big picture, to step back from the strictly practical and particular, to self-reflect, to face the abstract and the long-range, and to think deeply. In other words, perhaps by turning to questions of theory, we may begin to mend our practical maladies.

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