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Slippery Concepts: How Political Values Guide Us and Misguide Us in the Search for the

Common Good

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Abstract

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My goal in this thesis is to explore a phenomenon which I call the problem of "slippery concepts". Following insights of Plato and Aristotle, I argue that value concepts are slippery because people tend to interpret them considering their own interests, so that often their meaning deteriorates and reverses as time goes on. Because of this slippery character, some value concepts that are initially intended to change society in a positive direction are often turned upside down and used as rhetorical tools to maintain the status quo instead. As Michelle Alexander writes, "the more things change, the more they stay the same" (Alexander 1).

To explore the problem of slippery concepts, I look first at the role of what I call "the core values," which are goals that we think are fundamental for promoting a decent society and for living a better life. In Chapter 1, I discuss a list of examples of core values of a good political system through an analysis of Pericles's *Funeral Oration* and explore the reasons for the deterioration of core values in 4 different political regimes: epistocracies, democracies, oligarchies, and tyrannies.

In Chapter 2, I discuss how ancient philosophers were preoccupied with the deterioration of these values and how they can be reversed to maintain oppression. I begin with Plato's analysis of the degradation of political regimes in *Republic* VIII-IX. This leads into an analysis of Aristotle's *Politics* V 10 and 11, where he discusses reversal as one of the main tricks for preserving a tyranny.

In Chapter 3, I discuss three modern examples of Aristotle's trick reversal, when politicians say one thing while do the opposite, and three modern examples of Plato's phenomenon of positive concepts that are supposed to be liberating but degrade into something oppressive. I end this chapter with a discussion of the War on Drugs as an example of both the trick of reversal and the phenomenon of degradation.

I conclude with a reflection of how our political world is complicated by the fact that value concepts are slippery and used to maintain oppressive behaviors and suggest strategies for preventing these phenomena and preparing citizens to engage in political conversations without being tricked.

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Introduction: A Brief Commentary on Slippery Concepts

What is the best form of government? What are the main features we expect from a good political system? What values should we pursue when we try to build a good political community? There is no universal agreement about how to answer these questions, from divergences about which criteria to use (e.g., justice, freedom, material well-being, etc.) to variations in how to understand these criteria or value concepts (e.g., what is just or how justice should be upheld). From the ancients to contemporary times, philosophers and politicians have come up with different ideas of how to govern, and how justice, freedom, and other factors play a role in a well governed community. My goal in this thesis is to explore certain phenomena that contributes to the difficulty of answering these questions, which I call (inspired by Socrates' experiences) the problem of "slippery concepts." Trying to derive a lesson from how Socrates struggled to find anyone who could offer a solid definition of virtue, courage, temperance, etc. and often encountered contradictions or experienced the feeling that even when we think we have finally grasped one of those concepts, it can quickly slip away, I argue that value concepts (i.e. ethical concepts, political concepts) are slippery because people tend to interpret them in light of their own interests and often their meaning deteriorates and reverses as time goes on. Because of this slippery character, some value concepts that are initially intended to change society in a positive direction are often turned upside down and used as rhetorical tools to maintain the status quo instead. As Michelle Alexander writes in her introduction of *The New Jim Crow*, in reference to the apparent transformation of America into a post-racial society and how our self-understanding as post-racial produces an illusory sensation of change, "the more things change, the more they stay the same. In each generation, new tactics have been used for achieving the same goals" (Alexander 1).

To explore the phenomena of "slippery concepts," I explore the role that what I call "the core values," which are goals that we tend to think are fundamental for promoting a decent society and for bettering life together, play in defining a society and in promoting narratives about what a society aims at. For example, one of the core values that societies are expected to aim at is justice, and it figures in the political proposals of ancient and modern philosophers and politicians, although they often have deep disagreements about how to understand the term. Everybody aims at justice and would even confront others in the name of justice, but they differ greatly on what justice looks like. As Aristotle claims in *Politics* III 9, both oligarchs and democrats aim at justice, but they have diametrically opposed concepts of it. Similarly, in modern times, nobody would deny to aim at justice, but while some modern authors (e.g. John Rawls and his followers) focus on justice as fairness, others (e.g. Robert Nozick) think that justice is given through freedom.[1] To explain the notion of slippery concepts with an example, I will consider the contrast between these views and suggest that the great divergences between theories and interpretations facilitate that these core value concepts often turn into mere rhetorical tools, whose meaning is impossible to pin down. Moreover, my worry is that while philosophers offer good reasons to think about these goals as fundamental for a good society, often these value concepts have been used to justify oppression and the opposite of what they initially intend. That is, these value concepts are used as a "trick" to get people to conform to a system that often does not have their best interests in mind.

A consequence of the phenomena of slippery concepts is that, while we should agree that a balance of the core values of justice, freedom, respect, knowledge, and enjoyment are the basis

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[1] For classic formulations of Rawls' and Nozick's views see REF Rawls (1971), Nozick (1974). I discuss these views below in Chapter 1 Section 2: Old and New Political Debates about Justice as Example of Slippery Value Concepts.

of a just government and are requirements should be used to measure the quality of a form of government, it turns out that simply aiming at those goals is not enough. In addition to aiming at the core values, I think it is important to develop a certain epistemic attitude in the citizens so that they do not mistake appearances for the real goals. For this reason, I argue, knowledge and truth play a crucial role in achieving a genuine development of these values in a society because of the way these values can become twisted for the benefit of the few. In other words, we need to watch that a society promotes these values *genuinely* and not merely *performatively*. A good political system, then, will be one that manages to offer strategies to its citizens to stay aware of the potential epistemic opacities that occur in political discourse and thus opens the possibility of not getting entangled in words and ultimately keep it real.

While democracy presents risks of manipulation of the public, I conclude that a true deliberative democracy is the best system to promote the core values and to promote people's awareness of the slippery nature of our value concepts. Mills argues that partisan interests can sometimes undermine what is best for society, which is why deliberation is needed. He writes that

> "The representative system ought … not to allow any of the various sectional interests to be so powerful as to be capable of prevailing against truth and justice and the other sectional interests combined. There ought always to be such a balance preserved among personal interests as may render any one of them dependent for its successes, on carrying with it as least a large proportion of those who act on higher motives, and more comprehensive and distant views" (Mill, Collected Works XIX: 447, cited by Ten 1998: 379).

Since partisans will have their own interests in mind, it is up to the citizens to keep each other in check regarding the content of the values they wish to pursue. If citizens do not keep their partisan counterparts in check, then the problem of the slippery concepts can occur.

An example of the slippery character of core value terms is the notion of happiness. Ancient thinkers address this question from different angles and always coincide in posing the

happiness or general *well-being* of the citizens as a criterion to measure the decency of a society. For example, in *Republic* IV Socrates agrees with Adeimantus that their ideal political system is the one that promotes happiness for all: "We take ourselves, then, to be fashioning the happy city, not picking out a few happy people and putting them in it, but making the whole city happy" (420c).[2] Similarly, in the *Politics II*, Aristotle claims that communities come together for the purpose of fulfilling people's needs but stay together for the sake of the "good life", "it is not possible for the whole to be happy unless most or all of its parts, or some of them, possess happiness" (1264b 18-20). They also agree that it is not easy to determine what that happiness consists of. Many Platonic dialogues portray Socrates' frustrated attempts of coming up with acceptable definitions of crucial ethical and political concepts. Perhaps more clearly, in *Nichomachean Ethics* I 7, Aristotle claims that the goal in life is happiness and everything we do in life is for the outcome of happiness, and yet, as he says, people disagree on their understanding of what happiness consists in and they aim at very different goals even if they call them by the same word:

> "Now such a thing happiness, above all else, is held to be; for this we choose always for itself and never for the sake of something else, but honor, pleasure, reason, and every excellence we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose each of them), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, judging that through them we shall be happy" (EN I 7, 1097a36-1097b6).[3]

In contemporary thought, Sarah Ahmed has pointed out the tricky usage that we make of the notion of happiness and how it can be used in an oppressive way. In her piece "Feminist Killjoys (And Other Willful Subjects)", Ahmed writes that

> "Our activist archives are thus unhappy archives. Just think of the labor of critique that is behind us: feminist critiques of the figure of "the happy housewife;" Black critiques of the myth of "the happy slave"; queer critiques

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[2] All references to Plato's *Republic* are to the translation by G.M.A. Grube reviewed by C.D.C. Reeve in Cooper & Hutchinson (1997).
[3] All quotations of Aristotle's works are from Barnes' edition of the Complete Works (1991).

of the sentimentalization of heterosexuality as "domestic bliss." The struggle
over happiness provides the horizon in which political claims are made. We
inherit this horizon" (Ahmed 3).

Happiness becomes a slippery concept when politicians use the antithesis as a way to oppress

minorities. Ahmed argues that

"To be willing to go against a social order, which is protected as a moral
order, a happiness order is to be willing to cause unhappiness, even if
unhappiness is not your cause" (Ahmed 3).

People who become activists and go against the social norms are going against what is deemed

"happy" and are labeled as the villains or the "killjoys" by those who want to maintain the status

quo in order to deter people from pursuing this path.

Just as with happiness, there are many different examples of value concepts that suffer

the phenomenon of degradation. For instance: inclusion, diversity, freedom, law and order, make

America great again, environmentally friendly, intersectionality. These terms are intended by

some to promote positivity and social progress, but they can be used to maintain oppression (and

some of them are even designed for that purpose, despite the appearances to the contrary). The

goal of this thesis will be to use the insights of some ancient Greek philosophers with the

purpose of analyzing this **"trick"** and think about strategies that could equip citizens in modern

day society to avoid it and to find genuine ways of achieving the positive goals they aim at.

In Chapter 1, I will discuss what the core values of a good political system are through an

analysis of Pericles's *The Funeral Oration.* After finding the 5 core values, I will discuss how

the value of justice is a slippery concept in that ancient and modern philosophers have different

definitions of what justice means. This leads to the discussion of the deterioration of core values

in 4 different political regimes: epistocracies, democracies, oligarchies, and tyrannies. The

chapter will end with a conclusion on how we use these values for political engagement.

In Chapter 2, I discuss how ancient philosophers were preoccupied with the deterioration of these values and with how they can be reversed in order to maintain oppression. I begin with Plato's analysis of the degradation of political regimes in *Republic VII and IX,* ending with how a democracy can turn into a tyranny. This leads into an analysis of Aristotle's *Politics* V 10 and 11, where he discusses the trick of preserving a tyranny by disguising it as benevolent. I end with a brief discussion of epistocracy as a solution to the problem of slippery concepts and degradation of political regimes but note that a true deliberative democracy is the real solution.

In Chapter 3, I discuss 3 modern examples of Aristotle's trick of saying one thing while doing the opposite, and 3 modern examples of Plato's phenomena of positive concepts that are supposed to be liberating but are truly oppressive and positive concepts that were created outwardly with the means of oppression. I conclude with a discussion of the War on Drugs as an example of both the trick (of changing things so that everything stays the same) and the phenomenon (of how a potentially positive term transforms into a tool for oppression). I discuss the birth and death of slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration and ultimately how they relate to the discussion in Chapter 2 of Plato and Aristotle.

I conclude with a reflection of how our political world is complicated by the fact that value concepts are slippery and used to maintain oppressive behaviors and suggest some strategies for preventing this phenomena and preparing citizens to engage in political conversations without being tricked.

Chapter 1: The Core Values of a Good Political System

Why Do Societies Pursue Great Values? Some Examples Ancient and Contemporary

Political communities are often organized not only with the purpose of survival but also with the purpose of living well, which is typically expressed by some great values that the community believes are worth pursuing to make common life better. Some of the great values that societies tend to pursue are justice, freedom, respect, knowledge, and enjoyment. Orienting the community's goals towards those ideals helps the citizens live well and be happy. However, while these political communities claim to be promoting these core values, we will see that often this is actually not the case.

The political system that has been typically considered most capable of bringing to reality many of these core values is democracy. Democracy has been long considered the best political system because it is thought to be the government representing the many rather than the few. In this chapter I explore how a balance of the 5 core values are upheld in democracy and the reasons as to why people have held democracy in higher esteem by looking at Pericles' description of the democratic Athens in *The Funeral Oration*.

The reason for this discussion of the 5 core values is to show what the basic principles are for a society to promote for the well-being of its citizens. We see a pattern of people trying to encourage political participation and cooperation by getting people to support a specific value, so the discussion of what these values are is needed. However, it is also important to note that these values can become slippery because people have different definitions of the value terms based on their own agendas. In addition to the slipperiness, different regimes privilege certain values of others which leads to the degradation of those regimes.

Pericles' Praise of Democracy: Analysis of the Funeral Oration

In *The Funeral Oration* (Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* II 37-46), Pericles's discusses the virtues of the Athenian Democracy which makes it different from the other political systems that were around during this time. The values of a democratic society that attribute to the greatness of Athens, according to Pericles, are that it provides equality before the law, public office positions are given based on merit, freedom of action and speech, respect for diversity and the law, and institutional protection to its citizens. In addition, other advantages of the Athenian democracy are public entertainment, supply of material goods, friendly foreign policy, liberal education, cultural development, universal participation in politics/public affairs, and civic courage.

These virtues and advantages of the Athenian democracy created the backbone of our modern-day democracy and the central values that Pericles highlights are very close to those that we value in democracy today. I think we can categorize the different items from Pericles' list into five core values for a good political system: justice, freedom, respect, knowledge, and enjoyment. The success in each of these categories that Pericles praises in Athens is one of the reasons why he considers his city as the best place to live and flourish, and his explanations of how these different values are implemented in Athens can give us a sense of how they are positive ideals to pursue. In what follows, I offer first an explanation of Pericles' own understanding of the benefits of these values.

The first core value of Pericles' democracy is justice, which includes equality before the law, institutional protection of the most unfortunate ones, universal participation in politics and public affairs, and the fact that all public office positions will be held based on merit not social position or money. Pericles believes that this type of government is one that will be copied by others and one that is unlike the others.

> Its administration favors the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy. If we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences; if no social standing, advancement in public life falls to reputation for capacity, class considerations not being allowed to interfere with merit; nor again does poverty bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition (Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* II 37).

This value of justice, understood as equality and participation in the law, belongs in contemporary democratic ideals. For example, universal participation is seen through the ability of all citizens to vote in any election. All public office positions are also a quality seen in our democratic system. Equality before the law is given through the 14th amendment where all citizens of the US are given equal civil and legal rights.

Pericles adds that citizens should engage in public discussion and consider it as the best way to achieve true agency:

> "Our ordinary citizens, though occupied with the pursuits of industry, are still fair judges of public matters... we Athenians are able to judge at all events if we cannot originate, and, instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all" (Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* II 39).

This addition to what is entailed within justice is important because it creates a basis for deliberative democracy. The aspect of ordinary citizens being able to judge is seen in the jury system the United States democracy has. The judgement of the events that accord and the discussion is seen in the aspect of a trial that every person accused of a crime gets. In this speech, Pericles portrays Athens' justice system in a way that resembles the basis of our own criminal justice system and emphasizes citizens' participation and deliberation.

Another important core value that Pericles highlights in Athens' democracy is respect for the law, for diversity, and civic courage for the nation. Pericles makes an important distinction that freedom does not mean lawlessness. Instead, in order to have the freedom that a democracy provides, one must respect the law. He says,

> "Against this fear is our chief safeguard, teaching us to obey the magistrates
> and the laws, particularly such as regard the protection of the injured, whether
> they are actually on the statute book, or belong to that code which, although
> unwritten, yet cannot be broken without acknowledged disgrace"
> (Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* II 37).

Similarly, by respecting the laws you respect the people, your neighbors, and the country. Your respect for your country is seen through civic courage and the duty one feels to fight for their country when needed. "You must reflect that it was by courage, sense of duty, and a keen feeling of honor in action that men were enabled to win all this" (Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* II 43). Pericles explains that fighting for your country is the greatest honor and it produces happiness because it leads to freedom.

We can see these values in the United States' democracy in different ways. As a US citizen all men must register with the Selective Service when they turn 18. While joining the military in general is voluntary, there is a law where all able-bodied men will be drafted if there is a national emergency. Another law is Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which bans discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, and sex. Ultimately, if you do not follow the law in the US then you will be sent to prison. In these ways the tenets for respect in Pericles' notion of a democracy is seen.

Another important value that Pericles highlights in his democracy is knowledge, which includes a liberal education and cultural development through the importance of the arts and the expansion of knowledge in general. Pericles time in Athens was considered the golden age where education occupied a very important place:

> "We throw open our city to the world, and never by alien acts exclude
> foreigners from any opportunity of learning or observing, although the eyes of
> an enemy may occasionally profit by our liberality; trusting less in system and
> policy than to the native spirit of our citizens; while in education, where our
> rivals from their very cradles by a painful discipline seek after manliness, at
> Athens we live exactly as we please, and yet are just as ready to encounter

every legitimate danger" (Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* II 39).

This education was different than that of other cities because it did not just focus on military education. Different fields of knowledge such as the arts, sciences, and philosophy were just as important and did not deter them from being militarily equipped. Education was not necessarily forced, rather he supported the men's curiosity and interest in those different fields. The importance of a diverse education is seen in today's democracy through the liberal arts education system. The free public education system exemplifies how important education is to a society. Every child has the right to an education, and this allows for opportunities that other countries do not have.

The next core value that Pericles mentions is enjoyment, which allows for public entertainment and an abundant supply of material goods. Pleasure is an aspect that Pericles feels is important in a democracy. In order to gain pleasure and recharge the mind he says,

> "We celebrate games and sacrifices all the year round, and the elegance of our private establishments forms a daily source of pleasure and helps to banish the spleen; while the magnitude of our city draws the produce of the world into our harbor, so that to the Athenian the fruits of other countries are as familiar a luxury as those of his own" (Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* II 38).

Pericles also believes that within a democracy there will be an abundant supply of material goods through trade. This opens the community to foreign affairs and makes it so that the people of the community can have anything they want, and do not have to rely solely on the resources of Athens.

In modern day society there is a large importance on pleasure and enjoyment through entertainment. This is seen through movie theaters, the advancements of social media, and online streaming services like Netflix. These forms of entertainment also connect the US with all other

countries. Through companies like amazon, one is able to get products from any country. Foreign trade markets are the backbone of the United States.

To conclude, the crown of Pericles' core values is freedom, which contains both freedom for action and speech. Through the aspects of justice, Pericles valued a system that promotes freedom. This type of freedom within the government is good, according to Pericles, because it will transfer to the freedoms people can enjoy in their everyday lives. People will not be against each other,

> "We do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbor for doing what he likes, or even to indulge in those injurious looks which cannot fail to be offensive, although they inflict no positive penalty" (Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* II 37).

Freedom for people to do as they please and say as they please, if it is within the legal limits, creates balance between the other values. With respect of the laws comes enjoyment of pleasures. With equality of people comes the ability to gain a diverse knowledge. All of this would not be able to happen without some aspects of freedom is the individual life. This freedom in individual life is ultimately good for the city because it creates harmony and allows for growth.

Today we value freedom as one of the most important values. The importance of freedom is seen in the fact that it is the first amendment of the constitution: freedom of speech, religion, press, assembly, and petition. This type of freedom allows individuals to live as they please, which Pericles continuously brings up as important in his speech.

However, while Pericles defends the superiority of democracy because it promotes all these values, we know from the criticisms of e.g., Plato, that even during his time and vigilance the system can deteriorate or can only partially achieve what it intends to achieve. For example, in Pericles' Athens, minorities (such as slaves, foreigners, and women) were silenced and

oppressed, and only a few were privileged enough to be included among the citizens; moreover, given traditional elitism, those with money and social position did receive privileges, and freedom of speech led to the growth of sophists and rhetoricians who were professionals in charge of producing persuasion and manipulating people's opinions with no regard to the goodness of the results. Similarly, in our own democracy, not everyone is truly equal before the law, money and social position keeps receiving privileges, and racial biases create an environment of inequality. Why does this deterioration of the system occur? Part of it is simple corruption. But, as I argue below, part of it might be because value concepts such as equality before the law, public education and access to knowledge, freedom, etc. are slippery themselves. That is, there are internal tensions between the values themselves and within the values themselves.

Part of the issue, which has been at the center of discussions in political philosophy for long is that some political models, and even some versions of democracy, promote certain values (e.g., freedom) at the expense of other ones (e.g., equal opportunities). Another important problem, which I want to pay closer attention in this thesis is that the values themselves and the implementations of those values deteriorate so that what is initially defended as a virtue of the system can transform into a tool for oppression and exclusion instead.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I explore how different thinkers have different interpretations of the core values and how different political regimes privilege certain core values over others, under the assumption that some of them are more fundamental for the promotion of the well-being of all. For example, as referenced in the introduction, some philosophers believe that justice as fairness is the most important, while others believe that justice as freedom is the most important. Similarly, this is seen in different political regimes. Epistocracies privilege

knowledge and truth as the core value with the purpose of promoting the other values; oligarchies might promote material well-being over freedom or justice and equality, and even in the case of modern democracies, the value of freedom is promoted over the rest with the assumption that it is the most fundamental one without which the others cannot occur. The purpose of this discussion of the reasons why some regimes privilege some values over others is to establish that the interpretation of these values is controversial and varies depending on the ideologies, with the result that people disagree greatly about their relative worth. The discussion will reveal as well that the understanding of these values is sometimes deformed by the goals and aspirations of people—they are willing to sacrifice the purity of some of these values for the sake of the promotion of others.

The next sections will discuss, first, several philosophical debates about the core value of justice as a slippery concept, and second, examples of the phenomenon of importance of values in real politics by exploring how actual political regimes sacrifice one value for the sake of another. In both philosophical projects and real-life political projects, the sacrifice of certain values for the sake of others might even be with the goal of increasing well-being genuinely, but my concern is that in all these cases part of the result is the degradation of how we understand these values in themselves.

Old and New Political Debates about Justice as Example of Slippery Value Concepts
Let us have a look first at some examples of theorizing about ethical and political concepts in ways that promote certain values at the expense of others. This is an old phenomenon, as Aristotle notices in the *Politics* when he refers to the different ways in which democrats and oligarchs understand the notion of justice given their own initial positions (*Politics* III 9). In contemporary philosophical debates, it is frequent to see some philosophers arguing for the

priority of one value over another in the political context: in the case of justice, some like Rawls argue for equality or fairness at the expense of personal liberties, while others such as Nozick consider that personal freedom should prevail and be the limit of equality and fairness.[4] The reason for discussing justice specifically is because justice is the basis as to why people privilege certain values of others i.e., since oligarchs see justice as inequality they privilege material wealth over equality.

1. Aristotle on the Justice of Democrats vs. The Justice of Oligarchs

In the Politics III chapter 9, Aristotle gives an ancient account of how justice can mean something to democrats and mean something entirely different to oligarchs. Both the democratic regime and the oligarchic regime believe in justice as one of their core values, but what is just seems to differ based on what other values the regimes are promoting- freedom versus material well-being. Aristotle writes

> "For example, justice seems to be equality, and it is, but not for everyone, only for equals. Justice also seems to be inequality, since indeed it is, but now for everyone, only for unequals. They disregard the 'for whom," however, and judge badly. The reason is that the judgement concerns themselves, and more people are pretty poor judges about what is their own" (Politics III 9, 1280a 10-15).

For democrats justice is equality and for oligarchs justice is inequality. For democrats, justice means freedom where if everyone has the same amount of freedom then they are equal. For oligarchs, justice is considered inequality because of the value of material well-being, and if you are unequal when it comes to that then you are unequal overall. Aristotle explains that this problem occurs because people have different notions of what constitutes a community and for

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[4] Justice is not the only philosophical concept that can be slippery due to different definitions. In *Politics* III 5 chapter 1, Aristotle gives an example of how the definition of equality can be different, thus making it a slippery concept.

what sake that community is together for. He gives the example that if the purpose of community was for property distribution, then the oligarchic view of justice makes sense. If someone has more money, then they can have more property. However, if the purpose of the community is to live well then, the democratic view of justice makes more sense (Politics III 9, 1280a 25-35).

Aristotle's description of the tensions between democrats and oligarchs shows that the core value of justice is a slippery concept, because people have different definitions of depending on their own perspective, circumstances, and interests. A regime can truly believe that they are promoting the same values, but the problem comes from the fact that the values can mean very different things for those in charge.

This example of the concept of justice is probably one of the most remarkable ones, since it is a value concept that has been at the center of political debates by many ancient and contemporary philosophers. In what follows, I look at the Rawls vs. Nozick debate to see how also in a more contemporary context we can also find very different, even clashing, definitions of justice.

2. The Rawls vs. Nozick Debate I: Rawls and Justice

Just as democrats and oligarchs disagreed about justice, we find a similar phenomenon in the more recent debate between John Rawls and Robert Nozick. Rawls' political philosophy is one that promotes justice understood as fairness as the core value of a society. Before Rawls' philosophy the most popular philosophical theory for political philosophy was utilitarianism which involved the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Rawls' problem with utilitarianism is that it cannot "provide a satisfactory account of the basic rights and liberties of citizens as free and equal persons", which Rawls believes is the most important requirement in a democratic society (Rawls TJ xii). A utilitarian would be able to justify, for example, sacrificing

the minority interests if it has the consequence of benefitting the majority. Rawls does not think

that this is a good enough system that promotes justice for all because it does not consider that

every human has certain basic rights, and he believes that this is not fair. Justice for Rawls is

> "The first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. A
> theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is
> untrue; likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-
> arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust. Each person
> possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society
> as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that the loss of
> freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others. It does not
> allow that the sacrifices imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of
> advantages enjoyed by many" (Rawls TJ 3).

By making justice as fairness the most important core value, Rawls believes that it will handle

the problem that was apparent in utilitarianism. He argues that a society is only good enough

when it does not only promote the greatest good for the greatest number of people, but it is also

regulated by justice (Rawls TJ 4). In order to figure out what principles of justice would govern

the basic structure of society; Rawls creates a thought experiment called an original agreement

which discusses what principles a "free and rational" person would create under the assumption

of equality- under the veil of ignorance (Rawls TJ 10). The veil of ignorance creates a situation

where:

> "no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does
> anyone know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his
> intelligence, strength, and the like. I shall even assume that the parties do not
> know their conceptions of the good or their special psychological
> propensities" (Rawls TJ 11).

Under this veil of ignorance people would create a society where they will not know if they will

be advantaged or not, which Rawls thinks will make them choose a society that is just- or fair for

all. This is where Rawls creates the difference principle, a new political philosophical theory.

The difference principle is thought to be a balance between egalitarian views and libertarian

views where the "idea is that the social order is not to establish and secure the more attractive

prospects of those better off unless doing so is to the advantage of those less fortunate" (Rawls TJ 65). The difference principle promotes the increase in advantage of the society as a whole and any advantage must benefit the most disadvantaged people in the situation. The difference principle leads Rawls to create the two principles of justice as fairness:

> "First: Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all. Second: Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity" (Rawls TJ 266).

These principles, followed in lexical order, are supposedly what the free and rational person would choose in a society where they do not know if they will be disadvantaged or advantaged because if they are to be disadvantaged then at least they will have the same basic liberties as anyone else which allows them to be active members in a society. Rawls' argument is that humans want to have the greatest number of primary rights and goods. When every person has an equal right to equal basic liberties, there will be the importation of programs such as taxation that will be imposed on individuals. In this way, humans are losing their freedom to choose and have certain things imposed on them without consent.

However, in order to believe in Rawls' view of political philosophy one must assume that people are not inherently selfish. Criticisms of Rawls's theories are that his theory produces excessive formalism, and it is a reduction to ideal theory. The basic liberties that people say are needed can be corrupted which is seen in the historical roots of oppression that Rawls does not consider. We will continue to see later on that through corruption and different definitions of values, philosophical theories, such as this one, are often degraded and reversed because of the want of power and domination.

3. The Rawls vs. Nozick Debate II: Nozick on Freedom

Nozick's response to Rawls' proposal is mainly covered in his book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, which was written in 1975 after Rawls' *Theory of Justice*. Nozick begins his book with the claim that "Individuals have rights, and there are things no person or group may do to them (without violating their rights)" (Nozick ix). Nozick's goal is to figure out what the job of the state is where individual freedom is not violated. For him, a society that promotes the core value of freedom is a well-ordered society. Nozick argues that justice is freedom, and this is at the expense of guaranteeing any basic or minimal primary rights or goods for all. The goal of the state for Nozick is very minimal in that he calls it the "ultraminimal state". He argues that

> "When the state threatens someone with punishment if he does not contribute
> to the protection of another, it violates (and its officials violate) his rights. In
> threatening him with something that would be a violation of his rights if done
> by a private citizen, they violate moral constraints" (Nozick ASU 163).

This view is that the state cannot impose any constraints on the citizen, such as taxation for welfare, without consent because it violates the individual's freedom. If the person did not consent to contributing to helping someone else, then the person does not have to. What follows from Nozick's view is that

> "Taxation, of the redistributive sort in which modern states engage in order to
> fund the various programs of the bureaucratic welfare state, is morally
> illegitimate. It amounts to a kind of forced labor, for the state so structures the
> tax system that any time you labor at all, a certain amount of your labor time –
> the amount that produces the wealth taken away from you forcibly via
> taxation – is time you involuntarily work, in effect, for the state. Indeed, such
> taxation amounts to partial slavery, for in giving every citizen an entitlement
> to certain benefits (welfare, social security, or whatever), the state in effect
> gives them an entitlement, a right, to a part of the proceeds of your labor,
> which produces the taxes that fund the benefits; every citizen, that is, becomes
> in such a system a partial owner of you (since they have a partial property
> right in part of you, i.e. in your labor)" (Feser IEP).

This argument is meant to show that this is not the job of the state because it is violating the individual's freedom of choice, which is unjust. A minimal state is a state "that is limited to the protection of the rights of person, property, and contract" (Mack SEP). This state does so by not

violating any person's natural rights through a process that Nozick calls the "Invisible Hand". Nozick believes that even without creating a contract that violates people's rights (in the way that "it is one thing for individuals to have rights and another thing for them to have rights to the protection of their rights") there will be some creation of a protective program through monopolies that will protect people (Mack SEP).

The problem with Nozick's view, from the Rawlsian perspective, is that Nozick sacrifices fairness for the sake of freedom. It does not consider, like Rawls' theory, history and how slavery and the Jim Crow Era created a society where equality is not possible without rights that protect other people's rights. Nozick believes that justice is freedom and not fairness, and as a result he pursues under the name of justice something very different than a Rawlsian pursues under the name of justice.

That there are these sorts of disagreements about how to grasp a concept is obvious, but a couple of details from these debates that are relevant for our purposes are first, the grasp of a concept is obscured by politicians and philosophers when they are trying to promote a certain agenda, and second, the disagreements are not necessarily because thinkers try to promote different values, but that they understand the same value differently.

Examples of Core Value Devaluation in Concrete Political Regimes

Similar to how certain philosophers promote specific values over others, some political models promote certain values at the expense of other ones. In this section I discuss how epistocracies, democracies, oligarchies, and even tyrannies, promote a few core values at the expense of other core values. We see that epistocracies will promote truth and knowledge at the expense of justice and freedom. Democracies promote freedom and justice at the expense of truth. Oligarchies promote material well-being over freedom, justice, and equality. Lastly, even tyrannies are

initially supported because they are seen to promote freedom of the stronger at the expense of justice for everyone else. Plato was aware of this phenomena and captures it well in his discussion of the degradation of political systems in *Republic* VIII-IX, which I will discuss in Chapter 2 in more detail.

1. Epistocracies

Epistocracies promote the value of truth and knowledge over justice and freedom. In an epistocracy, the wise few rule over the rest of the population. The argument for epistocracies is that if you have the most knowledgeable people making decisions then the result will ultimately be better political outcomes. This could initially be a good thing, but it ends up devolving into the alienation of the rest of the population. In David Estlund's "Why Not Epistocracy", he argues against epistocracy through "The Demographic Objection: the educated portion of the populace may disproportionately have epistemically damaging features that countervail the admitted epistemic benefits of education" (Estlund 62).[5] This means that the people who would be considered most educated in society are educated by the result of epistemic advantages. For example, in the case of the United States, because of the country's history of oppression, the educated population is not necessarily the best group for making the decisions that benefit everyone.

Estlund gives the example of literacy tests during the Jim Crow era, which were designed to keep African Americans from voting (Estlund 62). While a certain percentage of the population might be in higher education, that is not a good representation of actual knowledge considering a large percentage of the population does not have the same opportunities to attend higher education. Consequently, while epistocracies try to promote knowledge, they do not

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[5] For more information against epistocracies read "Why Not Epistocracy" by David Estlund.

necessarily promote justice, equality or freedom because, as Eslund argues, the decisions of the government might not be to the advantage of everyone the government is supposed to protect.

2. Democracies

Democracies often promote the value of freedom at the expenses of truth. In his book, *Against Democracy*, Jason Brennan begins with the reasons that people promote democracies: "Democracy is a uniquely just form of social organization. People have a basic right to an equal fundamental share of political power. Participation is good for us; it empowers us, it's a useful way for us to get what we want, and it tends to make us better people" (Brennan 7). Those who are against epistocracies would agree with this because in a democracy people are supposedly getting representation for their values. Brennan's arguments against democracy are that: political participation corrupts us by giving us a means to hate each other, the right to vote should not be like other civil liberties like freedom of speech, religion, or association, and universal suffrage makes most voters make political decisions that are ignorant and irrational (Brennan 7 and 8).[6] While a democracy is the best government we have so far, Brennan tries to advocate the just because it is the best of what is known does not necessarily mean that it is the most just. Democracies are vulnerable, like any other political regime, and this vulnerability in terms of freedom can manipulate people into renouncing things that are good for them. Although I will discuss this in more depth in Chapter 2, Plato argues that when there is too much freedom it can lead to chaos because people become too sensitive to any form of authority.

3. Oligarchy

In oligarchies there is the promotion of the value of material abundance and efficiency over freedom, justice, and equality. Like an epistocracy, in oligarchies there is the rule of a few-those

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[6] For more information about this argument against democracy, read "Against Democracy" by Jason Brennan.

with the most wealth, over the many- those who do not have most of the wealth. In his book

"Oligarchy", Jeffrey A. Winters writes that "an understanding of oligarchs and oligarchy begins

with the observation that extreme material inequality produces extreme political inequality"

(Winters 4). He notes that material inequality is not a large issue in other forms of government,

but it is the main source of inequality in political power for oligarchies. While an oligarchy could

be seen as a positive regime in that if their views line up with the views of the many then there is

an abundance of material wealth to fix issues, often, oligarchies devolve into creating

excessively restrictive measures that focus on the material stuff rather than the people. Winters

explains how

> "Oligarchs are the only citizens in liberal democracies who can pursue their
> personal political objectives indirectly and yet intensively by exerting
> determined influence through armies of professional, skilled actors (the
> middle and upper class worker bees helping produce oligarchic outcomes)
> who labor year round as salaried, full-time advocates and defenders of core
> oligarchic interests" (Winters 18).[7]

Winters believes that this is a good thing because oligarchies are then the best to protect the

safety of the country. However, we see the pattern of what the political system should be used

for. If the system is used simply for protection and winning wars, then maybe an oligarchy would

be best because of its efficiency. However, this is not the society we live in today and as Plato

explains in the *Republic*, oligarchies end up oppressing the people and leaving them unprepared

for the benefit of keeping the wealth in their own hands.

4. Tyranny

Even tyranny might be initially understood as defending certain positive values at the expense of

others. Tyrannies come from the people in a time of desperation, and they disguise themselves as

being benevolent and for the people. Callicles in the Gorgias seems to defend tyranny or the rule

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[7] For more information on the pros of oligarchy read "Oligarchy" by Jeffrey A. Winters.

of the stronger over the many, where the stronger take as much as they want, as the realization of

the value of true freedom. Callicles argues against Socrates and says,

> "But I believe that nature itself reveals that it's a just thing for the better man
> and the more capable man to have a greater share than the worse man and the
> less capable man. Nature shows that this is so in many places; both among the
> other animals and in whole cities and races of men, it shows that this is what
> justice has been decided to be: that the superior rule the inferior and have a
> greater share than they" (Gorgias 483d).

The concessions to the many or to the others is seen as a weakness and as limitations to one's

freedom and self-realization. Here we see that Callicles has a different version of justice than that

of fairness. He believes in justice in the way that the oligarchs and maybe even Nozick believe in

justice, freedom to do what you please even if it produces inequality. However, as we see

through history, even tyrannies can turn into something bad for the tyrant because they are

subject to the whims of the population themself. When they are seen for what they truly are, the

people almost always revolt against them, thus ending the tyrant's regime.

How We Use Great Values to Move People towards Political Action/Engagement in
Contemporary Society

Some of the debates described in the previous section already reveal that while the values are

positive, they are understood and used in different ways by different thinkers, so that we must do

a lot of conceptual disentangling to be able to navigate the debates. When we look at how that

works in public debates things get even more complicated or confused. Politicians get people to

support certain topics that seem like they are positive.

For example, the term "law and order" was used as a positive term to make people wish

for safety and social harmony while really it was promoting initially the ideology and interests of

segregationists in the mid 1950s, and then the Nixon campaign to promote the War on Drugs in

the 1970s, etc. While I will go into this example in more detail in Chapter 3, I want to introduce

it here as one clear value term that was initially used to promote something that seemed positive but was just a way of maintaining oppression.[8]

Another example of this phenomena is the concept of "merit" in the affirmative action debate. In this context we find different positions that use merit in different ways with different purposes: Pete Wilson's neo-Augustinian definition of merit opposes affirmative action while Bill Clinton's neo-Pelagian definition of merit supports affirmative action.[9] The distinction between the neo-Augustinian and neo-Pelagian definitions of merit has to do with who merit is attributed to. For neo-Augustinians merit is attributed by God and external factors, while for someone with a neo-Pelagian view, merit is attributed to the self and your internal individual factors. Bill Clinton uses merit in a positive way in that it encompasses the capability someone can have and how these capabilities can be affected by the disadvantages they face in terms of race and gender. Pete Wilson reverses the way merit is seen by arguing that race and gender are things out of a person's control, and you have the merit to do anything only based on what God has given you. In this way, the slippery concept of merit creates two sides to the affirmative action debate.

This deterioration and reversal of values ultimately occurs because people use differing definitions and understand the concepts in ways that promote their own agendas. The next chapter expands on this phenomenon in terms of political regimes by analyzing how the phenomenon is treated in the works of Plato and Aristotle.

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[8] See Chapter 3, Section 2 "War On Drugs Michelle Alexander".

[9] For more information about the differing definitions of the term merit in the context of affirmative action read "Merit Badgering: Dissecting a Slippery Concept in the Affirmative Action Debate" by Timothy J. Lukes and Bonnie G. Campodonico.

Chapter 2: The Deterioration and Reversal of the Core Values

As we have seen in the previous chapter, most political systems are organized for the promotion of some central values that I have called "the Core Values." In each case, when things go well, people can organize societies oriented towards economic growth, equality, freedom, etc., in ways that benefit most or at least some of the participants in the political system. But as we have seen also, often these values can get corrupted and used for oppression instead of promoting social harmony and a better society. In the description of the decadence of the political systems in Plato's *Republic* VIII-IX, we find an early analysis of the reasons why this corruption of the values, or as I shall call it "deterioration", occurs. We see how Plato begins with an aristocratic regime that through the promotion of certain values they deteriorate and turn into another regime, for example a timocracy. We will analyze Plato's description in what follows and show how he sees each moment of decadence as a moment of deterioration and reversal of a core value: in the transition from aristocracy to timocracy, the pursuit of virtue and being admirable turns into the pursuit of honor and of being admired; in the transition from timocracy to oligarchy, the pursuit of honor and of being admired turns into the pursuit of material well-being and accumulated wealth; etc.

But why do people keep supporting regimes after they have deteriorated? Why is it difficult to detect when an aristocracy has turned into a timocracy or a timocracy into an oligarchy? We find an explanation of the reasons for this in Aristotle's *Politics*, where he gives an account of strategies that rulers can use to make things seem to people different from how they are and consequently the rulers are able to maintain the status quo without resistance.

My goal in this chapter is to argue that Plato's analysis of the deterioration of regimes and Aristotle's insights about the tyrants' strategies for reversal are useful tools to analyze some parallel contemporary phenomena that will be discussed in Chapter 3.

The Decadence of Pericles' Regime

Pericles' Funeral Oration was a speech on the virtues of Athenian democracy. Pericles valued the empire of Athens and believed that a democratic city-state that balanced justice, freedom, respect, knowledge, and enjoyment would be a well-ordered government. However, the original democracy that Pericles praises ends up falling and this inspires Plato's political philosophy. Gary Bass, a writer for The New Yorker, wrote on how

> "In 430–429 B.C.E., Athens was devastated by a mysterious epidemic, which reared its head again a few years later. Tens of thousands of people died, perhaps as many as one-third of Athenians. Society was ravaged, and the military, which was in the early stages of a brutal twenty-seven-year war against Sparta, was debilitated for many years. The catastrophe contributed to Athens's shattering defeat, in 404 B.C.E., by the loutish Spartans, who tore down the city's walls and imposed a short-lived but murderous oligarchy" (Bass "The Athenian Plague, A Cautionary Tale of Democracy's Fragility).

In a time of death and despair, the people of Athens were vulnerable which was the perfect time for Alcibiades to enforce an oligarchy. Philosopher Plato does not think that this is an accident, and it is due to the degradation of the ideology of the core values that typically happens by the corruption of the main concepts. As seen earlier, core values such as freedom can be slippery and can lead to politicians using propaganda and lying to promote their own agendas. This is an important worry for Plato and Aristotle, and we will see in these next sections: Plato's analysis of the decadence of the regimes into tyranny and Aristotle's account of how a tyranny is preserved.

<u>Plato's Analysis of the Deterioration of political systems in Republic VIII-IX</u>

In Plato's discussion of the deterioration of the political regimes, the problem with the regimes is both that the values degrade and become oppressive in themselves, and that the values from the beginning exclude part of the population. I think we can read Plato's analysis of the decadence of the souls and the political regimes in the Republic VIII and IX as a study of how positive concepts are degraded.[10] After discussing aristocracy (rule of the best), Plato begins by looking at the faults of the four different types of political regimes: timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny. The purpose of this discussion is to analyze how each regime privileges certain values over others, which leads to the deterioration of that regime into an entirely different regime.

Plato considers first **aristocracy**, which Socrates and Glaucon agree is the best kind of government because rulers have full virtue and knowledge. For a government to be good Socrates believes that education, the way of life, wives and children should all be in common; the rulers themselves should also be the smartest in philosophy and in warfare (543a). While an aristocracy is considered, by Socrates, the best government he also explains how an aristocracy can fall. An aristocracy will ultimately fall because rulers are human and will eventually make mistakes on who should be their predecessors and they will

> "Have less consideration for music and poetry than they ought, then they will neglect physical training, so that your young people will become less well educated in music and poetry. Hence, rulers chosen from among them won't be able to guard well the testing of the golden, silver, bronze, and iron races... The intermixing of iron with silver and bronze with gold that results will engender lack of likeness and unharmonious inequality, and these always breed war and hostility wherever they arise. Civil war, we declare, is always and everywhere 'of this lineage'" (546e).

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[10] In "Degenerate regimes in Plato's Republic", Zena Hitz discusses a similar analysis of how these regimes are regimes of the appetitive soul, rather than the reason part of the soul, and are guided by shadow virtues. "They are courage (without wisdom) in timocracy, moderation (understood as constraint) in oligarchy, and justice (reduced to lawfulness) in democracy. These shadow-virtues give the regimes definition and structure, and make a regime one type and not another" (Hitz 123).

Because of this civil war there will be a separation between the iron and bronze type of people and the gold and silver type of people. The civil war will lead to a compromise that results in private property, enslavement, and a state of war.

Socrates also explains that a son becomes a timocrat after hearing his mother complain about his father being too indifferent which feeds the spirited and appetitive part of the soul, while the father continues to feed the ration part of the soul (549d-550b). What is interesting about this discussion is that it shows that even the best kind of government which values wisdom and virtue results in an alienation for those who have different preferences- those who have a need for recognition and material well-being. Socrates argues that the fall of aristocracy coincides with the rise of timocracy, the government that is a midpoint between an aristocracy and an oligarchy.

Timocracy is a government for the love of victory and honor, which in principle could be a correction of the aristocratic regime. It is a halfway point between an aristocracy and oligarchy, and Plato characterizes it as a degradation and as a worse regime (547c-548c). The characteristics of a timocracy are "respect for rulers; the disqualification of the warrior element in the state from agriculture, manual employment or any other kind of business; the establishment of communal living quarters; and the concentration of physical education and training for war" (547e). Plato concludes that within a timocracy, since it is a mixture of oligarchy and aristocracy, there will be a division between people's wants for money and possessions versus their value of philosophy and virtue. The degraded aristocracy part of timocracy, which is now spirited, will lead people to value war over peace, while the oligarchy part will lead people to keep private their monetary gains (548a-b). Since there was a higher value on physical education rather than on education of the arts, people respond more to force

than to persuasion. Plato believes that a Timocracy would be good and bad, just and unjust (548c). The good part is that there is a love of honor and respect, but the bad part is that because there was a lack of importance on education of the arts, there is more exploitation in warfare, as well as the harsh enslavement of people (549a). The timocratic man is not necessarily a bad man, while he does keep bad company, he ends up being a man who loves victory but also loves honor (550b).

Plato defines **oligarchy** as "the one where the rich rule, and a poor man is excluded from power" (550d). The oligarch values material wellbeing and external goods such as wealth, safety, etc. An oligarchy forms from a timocracy when the rich get caught up with keeping their wealth. Initially they start accumulating for the purposes of material wellbeing, but gradually accumulation becomes a goal. A consequence of this is that only they can become the rulers, which creates a divide between the rich and the poor (551b). Oligarchs will come to fear that the poor will revolt against them, so they do not arm them. They will also not put any money into funding anything, including a war because they would rather keep the money for themselves. This ultimately puts the oligarchs in a bad position when it comes to anything (551e). The lack of education and increase in poverty will lead to an increase in crime which will make the oligarchical regime collapse (552e). With the rise of the poor to get rid of the wealthy, rises a democracy.

Democracies promote freedom, liberty, and diversity (557). People will come into power, not based on who should be in charged based on qualifications, but by being the most popular (558a-c). Plato makes a distinction between necessary and unnecessary desires where necessary desires are those that you cannot justly ignore because they are often part of human nature, while unnecessary desires are those that do not do the person good but makes them

happy. The democratic man will always have to choose between those necessary and unnecessary desires, and this obsession with freedom will lead to the collapse of democracy (559a-561e). The collapse of democracy because of the obsession with freedom leads to the rise of tyranny. Plato explains that when people become so obsessed with freedom it makes

> "The citizens' souls so sensitive that, if anyone even puts upon *himself* the least degrees of slavery, they become angry and cannot endure it... they take no notice even of the laws- written or unwritten- in their determination that no one shall be master over them in any way at all" (563e).

Ultimately, this creates disorder leading to the rise of a tyranny. This as an example of the deterioration and reversal of the core value of freedom. Freedom at first, as a value to be promoted amid an oligarchy was seen as a good thing. However, with time, corruption, and people's different perceptions of freedom, we see that it can easily be turned into something negative that ends up oppressing the community.

Socrates begins his section on the degradation of democracy into a tyranny by explaining that "extreme freedom cannot be expected to lead to anything but a change to extreme slavery" (564a). The reason for this is because anything that is excessive on one side ends up becoming the opposite (563e). What is important to note is that a **tyrant** comes from the people. The tyrant will come in a time of need and disguise himself "making all sorts of promises both in public and in private, freeing the people from debt, redistributing the land to them and to his followers, and pretending to be gracious and gentle to all" (566e). However, while the people help the tyrant come into power and the tyrant feels safe from enemies, the tyrant is actually "always bound to be stirring up war" (567a). This is because a tyrant cannot have friends nor enemies, they must not have anyone who can question or criticize them in order to stay in power. This leads us into the analysis of Aristotle's Politics V 10-11 where he explains how the tyrant can preserve his regime.

Manufacturing Deterioration: Aristotle's Advice to the Tyrant on How to Preserve a Political Regime

In *Politics* V 10-11, Aristotle explains how a tyranny comes to be and how a tyrant can preserve a tyranny. What is interesting in Aristotle's discussion for our purposes is his explanation of how successful tyrants need to make their regimes and intentions look like they are benefiting people, even if the goal of their policies is to benefit the tyrants themselves. To achieve this goal, tyrants use several strategies that make their regimes look more benevolent and populist than they really are, and particularly, when people are starting to question the regime, tyrants need to make visible changes, so that people think that their complaints are being answer, even though the tyrant's intention is to make mere apparent changes while trying to keep the status quo.[11] One of the central strategies that tyrants use for this purpose, is that of reversal of value terms, so that they speak and make things seem as if they are supporting the cause of justice, freedom, etc. when they are really working against those values.

As we have seen in the previous section Socrates explains that tyranny comes to be through having an extreme form of democracy. It is when people begin to hate the elites and put someone else in charge. Aristotle's insight is that tyrants are initially supported and put in power by the people and are expected to produce changes that do away with the problems of the preceding system. Aristotle writes that a "a tyrant is chosen from the people to be their protector against the notables, and in order to prevent them from being injured. History shows that almost all tyrants have been demagogues who gained the favor of the people by their accusation of the

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[11] For a discussion of this phenomenon, and its connection with Michelle Alexander's thesis that sometimes regimes need to produce apparent changes so that everything stays the same, I have benefited from the ideas in Molly Kelly's "Aristotle Revisited: Hybrid Regimes, Revolution, and the Sense of Injustice" (unpublished manuscript), and from discussions with her in class.

notables" (1310a). This problem of the hatred of the elites ends up motorizing a regime that is even worse than the one they have now. That is, even from the beginning, the success of the tyrant depends on being seen, at least by some, as a solution to what people perceive as the problems of their time.

Once this person is put into charge, they must preserve their tyranny. Aristotle offers several strategies that will help one accomplish this goal that can be put into two modes. The strategies that can be put into the first mode are those that show that the tyrant is malevolent: eliminating the high-minded men, keeping a lookout for things that give rise to high-mindedness and mutual trust, prohibiting schools and keeping people as ignorant as possible, pit people against each other, and taxation. While these strategies help in preserving a tyranny, the best strategy is a different mode for Aristotle, and it is to make the people think the tyrant is a benevolent monarch because **"**the two principal motives people have for attacking tyrannies are hatred and contempt" (1312b)**.** The goal of this would be to make the regime seem beneficial for the citizens when it is just for the purposes of promoting with the tyrant wants, which is to preserve the tyranny. The aims of tyranny are that the ruled not trust one another, that they be powerless, and that they think small (1314a). Aristotle writes that, "a tyrant should perform or seem to perform everything else in a noble, kingly fashion" (1314a). He must make sure the public sees him as good and dignified, "a tyrant must do the opposite of well all the things we mentioned a while back. For he must lay out and beautify the city-state as if he were a household Stewart rather than a tyrant" (1314a). While Aristotle believes this is the best way for a tyrant to preserve their tyranny and the tyrant is portraying himself as benevolent, what is important here is that they are doing it with the wrong intention. A tyrant who disguises himself as a benevolent monarch succumbs to the phenomenon of acting *performatively*, not *genuinely*.

As Aristotle and Plato have discussed, tyrannies come about from democracies and when the people need something radically different. We can see this pattern emerge through examples of tyrannies in the world. For example, before Hitler came into power, Germany was destroyed in the aftermaths of World War I. People were starving, exhausted, angry, and had no hope left. As Theodore Abel discusses in "Why Hitler Came into Power", the monarchical government of Prince Max of Baden hid as a democratic government for the people and when that failed, the National Assembly elected a president who followed a moderately socialist government (Abel 15-20). After the treaty of Versailles was signed there was an overwhelming distain towards it as they believed it "curtailed the power of the nation, deprived it of its prestige, attacked its traditions, and impaired its integrity, it was regarded as a fatal thrust against social values held and shared by the vast majority of Germans" (Abel 30). Because of this hatred towards the democratic regime, the Nationalist Socialist Party was formed, leading to the horrors of World War II.[12]

In the example of Germany, we can see the theme of a regime seeming to be something they are not, especially when Prince Max of Baden tried to disguise his monarchy as a democracy. The phenomenon that Aristotle analyzes is how tyrannical regimes often perform what seem radical changes in order to maintain the status quo. Aristotle's rule is that the tyrant's response to people's dissatisfaction in times of crisis should seem to make important reforms, so that people think progress has been made, while everything stays the same. In Chapter 3, I will go more in depth on how the rhetoric of benevolence or tyrannical is amplified by the media and propaganda.

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[12] For more information about the history of how the Nazi Party and Hitler movement came to be read "Why Hitler Came Into Power" by Theodore Abel.

The Philosophers' Epistocracy as a Solution to the Problem of Deterioration and Reversal

Plato's *Republic* proposes epistocracy as a solution to the problem of the degradation of slippery value concepts that turn democracies into tyrannies. To avoid leaving the masses in the hands of demagogues and potential tyrants, those who have knowledge (the philosophers) should be in charge and protect the political narratives, the education, and the cultural institutions in general. While Plato's version of epistocracy is not popular today, there are increasing recent defenses of epistocracy in contemporary political philosophy. As Thomas Mulligan explains in "Epistocracy and Public Reason", that

> "There is a small but growing interest in governments characterized not by the equal participation of all citizens, but rather by the entrusting of political power in the hands of an elite subset of them-namely, those who will do a better job of governing owing to their superior political knowledge" (Mulligan 258).

While epistocracies might have advantages, they have the danger of producing a gap between those in charge and those ruled. The main problem of epistocracy is that it leaves a big part of the population out of the public deliberations, alienates them, and does away with the potential positive values of equal participation, equal opportunity, etc.

For Mulligan, the reason an epistocracy is not the solution is because "the process by which a positive trait is produced concomitantly produces a negative trait" (Mulligan 463). Mulligan gives the example of a person who is knowledgeable about international finance. This knowledge was most likely attained through a job like that of one on Wall Street. It is likely to assume that a person who is knowledgeable about international finance is not as interested in social justice and the needs of the disadvantaged (Mulligan 463). There is no way in which an epistocratic government could represent the needs of all because of the reoccurring pattern that politicians want to promote their own agendas. Therefore, a true deliberative democracy is the solution to the phenomena that has been presented throughout this thesis. However, as we have

seen in this chapter (with the example of Pericles' democracy) and as we will see in the next chapter, even a democracy is not invulnerable to the degradation of core values because of corruption and disguise.

Was Plato's intuition right that an epistocracy could solve those problems of deterioration and reversal of a society's core values? If we understand epistocracy as Mulligan and some other contemporary authors (such as Estlund, Anderson) do, then the idea is often that those in power are supposed to have knowledge about technical matters such as political economy, social organization, etc., and they are supposed to be better at making political decisions based on that knowledge. Plato's point, however, is a little different, and the kind of knowledge that he thinks relevant is, as he establishes in *Republic* V-VII, knowledge of dialectics (532-537) and of the Forms. I think that the point Plato is trying to make is that philosophers could know what is necessarily good, but more importantly their knowledge of dialectics and their familiarity with the Forms makes them aware of the slippery nature of value concepts. In that case, Plato's proposal would be very different from the kinds of epistocracies that modern authors suggest, it would be instead an epistocracy based on people who know about the slipperiness of values and regimes and have the tools to keep it from happening.

Much of the discussion surrounding epistocracy focuses on the kind of knowledge that is too narrow in comparison to the knowledge philosophers are supposed to have, which is knowledge of the trick. If we were to leave a Rawlsian or Nozickian in power, they would fall into the trick quickly because they are not considering the depth of injustices. This begs the question of what the relevant type of knowledge is for the best political outcomes and the well-being of the citizens. I will pick up this discussion in Chapter 4, where I discuss potential strategies for overcoming the trick.

Chapter 3: The War on Drugs as an Example of Manufacturing Reversal

My analysis in the previous chapter of the views of Plato and Aristotle on the degradation of political systems and on the sources of tyranny highlights that, for both authors, the slippery character of value concepts is precisely what politicians and people in power tend to use to promote their own interest. And, in turn, this focus on self-interest produces the reversal of the values so that they are compatible with their individual projects. As a result, even core values that are initially liberatory and aimed at moving the community towards a better place turn to be, instead, oppressive and to move the community towards more inequality and maintaining the status quo. That is what we see in the regression of regimes that Plato describes in *Rep.* VIII and IX, and, similarly, in the more intentional description of how to maintain tyrannies in power that Aristotle offers in *Politics* V.

In the present chapter, I apply this lens to explore modern examples of the trick of reversal of value concepts, and I look at some examples in contemporary American politics where apparent progress is turned into more (and more sophisticated) oppression by turning value terms (and projects) that are initially positive into something different. First, this reversal occurs in relation to policy issues where Presidents run on a message of change, but then the evidence during their presidency shows that the opposite has happened. But more importantly for our purposes, the trick of reversal occurs in the rhetoric and narratives used by those with political power, who use value concepts that could initially be, liberating, and generate positive change, but are either used to maintain the status quo (as in Aristotle's tyrant) or bring even more deterioration of the political situation (as in Plato's degeneration of the regimes). Examples are

terms and phrases such as "law and order," "make America great again," "inclusion," and "post-racial society".

The main example of the trick that I will discuss, that occupies the final sections of this chapter, is the notion of "law and order" which was presented as an attractive and positive value to produce social harmony and instead was used to maintain the segregation and discrimination from the Jim Crow era. In this process, as Michelle Alexander explains, the notion of "post-racial" or "race-neutral" is equally used as a term that initially has positive connotations and yet it turns to be an instrument to obscure the fact that things have not really changed.

Deterioration and Reversal in Modern America

I think that we can see the democratic cycles of regular turn-taking of Democrats and Republicans in contemporary America as a version of the trick of reversal on the preservation of a tyranny that Aristotle describes in *Politics* V 10 and 11. This is because politicians of the two parties give the appearance of change when many of the basic issues stand the same. Among the strategies to produce excitement for a project and support from the public are many, I focus in this section on two: (1) use of positive discourse, even if it does not cohere with the actual policies; and (2) use of positive value concepts to describe one's goals or produce self-narratives that often hide a different reality. Because of the positive discourse about certain issues, people tend to be confused when Democratic presidents adopt policies that do not seem democratic, and typically these Democratic presidents get less push back from the public than when Republican presidents take anti-popular measures, e.g., Obama's deportation, or Clinton's incarceration increase. While the phenomenon of Democratic presidents taking anti-democratic policies is more complex and global than the slippery-concepts phenomena I am exploring, it does contain some of its elements and often is aided by it. For example, when we have a look at how

democratic presidents have dealt with issues such as immigration and deportation, gun control, and the climate crisis, we can see the trick taking place by looking at the terms that politicians use. While the strategy to attain public support is connected to the slippery character of value concepts (in the sense that politicians are able to expand what is acceptable as a democratic policy, or as a pro-immigrant policy, etc.), it is the second strategy that fully relies on the slippery character of value concepts, in that they are often used as goals to get the public on board, while they are misinterpreted as to allow the continuation of business as usual.

In the remainder of this section, I will explore first, three examples of deterioration and reversal regarding policies of (A) immigration and deportation, (B) gun control, and (C) the climate crisis; second, I will explore the three examples of the trick (i.e., deterioration and reversal of value concepts) by looking at the terms (D) post-racial, (F) inclusion, and (F) "make America great again."

A. Immigration and Deportation

Policies of immigration and deportation are typically expected to be friendlier and less aggressive when democrats are in power; however, while democratic politicians maintain a discourse that is favorable to immigration and not harsh regarding deportation, the policies they adopt often do not reflect that trend. A clear example is what happened during the Obama era. While the Obama administration promised to govern for all and to fix the broken system of immigration, during the Obama period it seems as though there was no significant improvement of the situation of immigrants in America, and the immigration policies were sometimes even more strict than in other periods. While he might have improved the condition of some immigrants, the point is that overall, it was not necessarily better than before in important respects.

In a report for The Hill, Budryk explains that while the Trump administration was characterized as anti-immigrant and harsh in immigration policies, the numbers show that the Obama administration took harsher measures:

> "While the Obama administration deported 1.18 million people in his first three years, the number of deportations has been a little under 800,000 so far under Trump, according to the Post. The Obama administration also deported 409,849 people in 2012 alone, while the Trump administration has yet to deport more than 260,000 people in a year" (Budryk 1).

The rhetoric used my president Obama reflected, however, a different, more generous attitude about immigration. In his presidential address on the immigration system, Obama acknowledges the hardships that immigrants can face when he says,

> "You hear stories about young people who were brought here when they are 2/3 years old, are as American as any of us in attitude and love of country, but don't have the right papers, and as a consequence, they can't apply for scholarships, or they can't travel because they're fearful that it might mean they were deported. You know, what you realize is that's not what America is about" ("It's time to fix our broken immigration system" 1).

While Obama claims that he wants to hold people accountable but also that he wants to consider that people make mistakes. If his administration did truly care about the people who made those mistakes, then the statistics should have shown that. What is important to note here is that because Obama is a democrat, the media never portrayed him as someone who would have harsher deportation policies than Trump, who is a Republican. This connects to the main point of reversal and deterioration in that what is said by President Obama was not shown in his policy measures. Because he ran as a democrat, throughout his campaign he praised immigration, however we see that when he was president the numbers do not reflect being less harsh on deportation which shows that it does not matter if you are a democrat or a republican, the harshness of deportation does not get better.

B. Gun control

When it comes to the conversation around gun control it is a known thing, although be it a

stereotype, that Democrats are pro-gun control while Republicans are anti-gun control. In 2019

when Nancy Pelosi was able to get the House to pass a bill that "proposed requiring federal

criminal background checks on all firearms sales", Trump claimed that if it got to him, he would

veto it ("Federal Policy on Laws Governing Guns and Firearms, 2017-2020" 1). While this bill

did not get past the Senate, Trump's rhetoric portrays that he is pro-guns. With the increase in

gun violence Obama kept saying that "Now is the time to do something against gun violence",

and his rhetoric made the public expect some restrictions in gun use in America ("Now Is the

Time to Do Something about Gun Violence" 1); however the gun industry actually flourished

under the Obama administration more so than under the Trump administration.

> "The NSSF says that between 2008, when Obama was elected, and 2017 when
> he left office: Gun industry jobs grew 87%—but just 1.3% in the first full year
> he was out of office. Wages grew 142%—but just one-third of one percent
> since. The "total economic impact" of the industry grew 169%—but 1.4%
> since" (Brandus 1).

If gun violence was supposed to decrease during the Obama administration, then why did the gun

industry grow? Why was Trump more able to decrease the growth of the gun industry, even

though he is one of the largest supporters of the NRA? The NRA spent $30 million to get Trump

elected, and yet Trump was in support of taking away guns after the massacre at Marjory

Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida. He said, "take the guns first, go through due process

second" and even went further to ban bump stocks, which is more than the Obama administration

ever did (Brandus 1).

The example of gun control policies is ultimately another example of what is said by

politicians during their campaigns and the stereotypes that surround the political parties do not

reflect what occurs during their presidency. This is an example of reversal in that while President

Trump claims to support the NRA and the Second Amendment, his policies and his effect on the gun industry shows that the opposite (or the reverse) occurred. This connects to the aspect that politicians during campaigning promise certain things based on their relationship with a certain political party. However, we see that once they are president, the polarization of views is not what is seems to be. Instead, they run on these policies just to get elected, and then keep everything the same throughout their presidency.

    C. Climate Crisis

Another big topic where we find significant incoherence between discourse and policies and find Democratic politicians doing conceptual pirouettes to justify their positions is the climate crisis. While Biden ran in a campaign that promised a "whole of government" approach to the climate crises and did things in his first 100 days that were good for the environmental crisis, he has now slowed down even though he created a sense of urgency claiming that "we literally have no time to waste" (Bort 1). What was said by Biden when during his campaign is therefore not being fulfilled now during his presidency.

In his article "They Were Joe Biden's Climate Allies. Now They're His Critics", Ryan Bort explains the reversal of the Biden administration on the climate crisis. During his campaign Biden promoted a $2 trillion jobs-centric climate package and on his first day he "signed executive orders setting ambitious energy goals, rejoined the Paris Agreement, and canceled the Keystone XL pipeline" (Bort 1). However now Biden has not been delivering on all of his promises. For example, "the bipartisan infrastructure bill was stripped of many clean energy initiatives" and while he promised to protect indigenous land, he has not blocked Line 3 or the Enbridge project that directly affects the indigenous land (Bort 1). Biden's administration

>"Defended Trump-approved oil-and-gas lease grants in Wyoming and a
>Trump-approved drilling project in Alaska, while passing up an opportunity to

> block the Dakota Access Pipeline. In July, the Associated Press reported that
> the Interior Department had issued 2,100 new oil and gas permits since Biden
> took office, setting a pace that would exceed even Trump" (Bort 1).

In this cycle of turn-taking we can clearly see that while Presidents run on certain campaigns their actions are all the same. Whether it is a democrat or a republican, there is more to the situation than meets the eye. Politicians ultimately find themselves consistently falling for the phenomena of seeming to promote something positive but actually doing the opposite. While there are other factors that can explain why politicians are doing what they are doing, this relates to the use of positive rhetoric to encourage people to get behind them and then failing to apply the ideas properly.

D. Post-Racial

A second strategy for the reversal and deterioration of concepts is through creating positive concept terms to produce a specific narrative, while hiding the reality of what these terms are meant to do. One example is the use of the term "post-racial" and the idea that we are in a "post-racial society."[13] When Obama was elected, people started saying that our society has become post-racial and has moved past racism, however the use of the term served to hide the racial tensions and discrimination that continued in the country. Post-racial, then, is one term that was initially intended portrayed as having positive effects (both aspirational and self-descriptive) but really it hurts the Black and other minority communities.

In Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's article "The Structure of Racism in Color-Blind, "Post-Racial" America", he argues that the term post-racial really just promotes racism without saying it is racism. Bonilla-Silva gives an example of other rhetoric that was used to promote the idea of

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[13] In Bonilla-Silva's article "The Structure of Racism in Color-Blind, 'Post-Racial' America", he discusses on how politicians like Obama have contributed to the concept of "post-racial society" in his section "Racism in Post-Racial America".

"post-racial" like the phrases "The past is the past" or "I did not own any slaves". Bonilla-Silva

uses the testimonies of regular white Americans, who started thinking that they did not need to

pay attention to race any more, such as this example of one of his interviewees, named Roland:

> "I think they've gotten enough. I don't think we need to pay them anything or
> I think as long as they are afforded opportunities and avail themselves to the
> opportunities like everybody else, I, I don't know why we should give them
> any reparation for something that happened, you know... I can't, I can't help
> what happened in the 1400s, the 1500s, or the 1600s, when the blacks were
> brought over here and put into slavery. I mean, I had no control over that,
> neither did you, so I don't think we should do anything as far as reparations
> are concerned" (Bonilla-Silva, 2013, p. 129).

When people like Roland say things like this, they are making the assumption that the Black

community is not still at a disproportionate disadvantage and that the White community does not

receive the benefits of being White. Bonilla-Silva argues that Obama being elected as president

and the subsequent talk about a post-racial society made the situation of the Black community

even worse. He explains how while Obama was President unemployment and poverty became

worse for Blacks and Latinos, and he spoke less about race than any other president to make sure

that he did not seem too black (Bonilla-Silva).

While the aspirations for a post-racial society could initially have been positive and could

have had a positive effect in our society, ultimately, the use of "post-racial" as a term because of

the fact that the United States elected a Black president was more harmful to the Black

community than beneficial.[14] "Post-racial society" in a positive way means that the society does

not discount race as a factor in that it has disproportionately disadvantaged people. It was

supposed to show how the society has moved to considering race as factor but without the

negative biases that we have had in the past. Instead, the concept has been degraded and reversed

and "post-racial", is now used by white people, like Roland, to claim that race is not an issue,

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[14] For more information on the effects of "post-racial" and colorblind actions in the US read "The Structure of
Racism in Color-Blind, "Post-Racial" America" by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva.

and that slavery was so long ago that it does not matter anymore. However, we know this is not true considering Black people are still unfairly treated and face discrimination.

E. Inclusion

Inclusion is another term that is rendered positive and used to promote the well-ordering of a diverse society. It is mainly used to promote the unity of minority groups into society and is used all the time in the aspect of "diversity and inclusion". Whether it is in schools or the workforce, inclusion seems to be a top priority for promoting diversity. While inclusion is a positive term that was initially used to liberate, Dotson and Spencer write on how the term inclusion can become slippery and fall under the trick. Dotson and Spencer are two Black feminist epistemologists who have seen how reductive inclusion is epistemologically unsound. They argue that when scholars resort to interpolation and ossification this creates a form of toxic inclusion that hurts the Black population. Their goal is not to get people to stop including different communities into research, but instead to stop making false claims and promoting them as true as this can represent "no one/nothing and everyone/everything in the relevant group" (Dotson and Spencer 55). Inclusion can fall under the slippery concept trick when scholars try to include different groups without doing enough research about the truth in that community. This ends up doing the opposite of inclusion and creates more of a divide because of the falsity.[15] While Dotson and Spencer are writing specifically about scholarly work, this can happen in many other platforms such as in the workforce or in policies. Inclusion in a positive way is seen in things like affirmative action, where it is recognized that people's backgrounds put them in different situations, and we must strive to continue to use inclusion in a non-slippery light.

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[15] For more information on the reductive inclusion tactics read "Another Letter Long Delayed: On Unsound Epistemological Practices and Reductive Inclusion" by Kristie Dotson and Ayanna De'Vante Spender

F. Make America Great Again

While the terms inclusion and post-racial were meant to be liberating but in fact do the opposite, the phrase Make America Great Again is different. This rhetoric was designed from the beginning to cover up bad intentions- that is to cover up anti-immigration sentiment. In their article "Politics of Fear versus Global Anxiety: A Critical Analysis of Recent US Anti-Immigration Policies from Psychoanalytic Perspectives", Lee and Bhuyan explain that the rhetoric used about immigration invokes anxiety and frames immigration in a fearful way. They argue that anti-immigrant rhetoric like "global anxiety", "refugee crisis", "global migration crisis", and "Immigration crisis" is correlated with "the current growth in xenophobic, Islamophobic and Anti-Semitic public views and policies" (Bhuyan and Lee). Like these phrases, the phrase "Make America Great Again" creates the same anti-immigration sentiment. Bhuyan and Lee ask the important questions to analyze this phrase: "First, why "again"? What was formerly "great" about America which has since been lost? By whom and since when?". They also give an example of how the Trump uses the phrase in the context of social issues:

> "When describing the attack on a Latino homeless man in Boston, Trump referred the actions of "passionate" followers who "love this country and want this country to be great again". And, at one of his rallies, Trump condoned violence against a Black Lives Matter activist who was assaulted by stating, "Maybe [the protester] should have been roughed up because it was absolutely disgusting what he was doing," referring to the protester's demands for Black Americans' protection from police violence" (Bhuyan and Lee).

As the article argues, the use of "Make America Great Again" refers to a time where white supremacy flourished, and minorities were oppressed- the pre-Civil War era. The rhetoric, while not explicitly saying that gives the impression that the America we live in has changed in a bad way. It opened an avenue for white conservatives to be blatantly racist and created hope for a

world where white supremacy lives on.[16] The rhetoric is ultimately another way in which politicians try to maintain their oppressive nature, which we will see in the next section using "law and order".

Just as in the case of happiness, justice, etc. "great" is initially a good thing, and yet it can be understood in the restricted, harmful way that Trump followers adopted. Great is to mean that a society is flourishing, and the well-being of all citizens is the goal. However, when Trump uses the term "great" it is to mean that the past, i.e., slavery, Jim Crow, and the US was overwhelmed with white supremacy was a time when the US was great. This reversal of the term falls under the same phenomenon that Aristotle describes in the *Politics* V 10 and 11, because it is a way in which the tyranny that is to be preserved is white supremacy.

Michelle Alexander's Analysis of the "War on Drugs"

While all the examples above are clear representations of the phenomena of deterioration and reversal and of what I have been calling "the trick (i.e. the strategy of making things appear to be changing for the better, when the only positive changes are superficial and things are instead not changing or changing for the worse), the example that motivated my initial interest is the one of "law and order," a phrase used to suggest intention of producing safety and social harmony, but used by those who wanted to maintain racial oppression and white supremacy. In the *New Jim Crow,* Michelle Alexander explains that the term "law and order," which was used historically to maintain oppression of Black people in America, more recently was used to promote the War on Drugs. Alexander argues that the War on Drugs is the New Jim Crow, and it is a way of

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[16] For more information on anti-immigration rhetoric and its effect on immigration policy read "Politics of Fear versus Global Anxiety: A Critical Analysis of Recent US Anti-Immigration Policies from Psychoanalytic Perspectives" by Eunjung Lee and Rupaleem Bhuyan.

maintaining the oppressive nature in communities of color by hiding it behind mass incarceration which is technically legal. This is, as I will argue in this chapter, a clear example of the reversal of a concept or ideal that in principle is positive and attractive but is turned into a tool of oppression.

Alexander draws parallels from the days of slavery to how criminals are treated today. Her view is that "mass incarceration in the United States had, in fact, emerged as a stunningly comprehensive and well-disguised system of racialized social control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow" (Alexander 4). While I will expand on this more throughout this chapter, the basis of her claims is that prisoners are the new slaves and as soon as someone is labelled as a criminal they become "second-class citizens" and are subject to the same old forms of discrimination that were used during the Jim Crow Era. The phrase "law and order" is then a slippery concept in that it was portrayed by the government to benefit the community by ridding it of drug crimes, which is supposed to be liberating, but instead its outcomes are reversed in that it harms the Black population through mass incarceration.

Birth and Death: Slavery and Jim Crow
I will begin this section with a discussion and analysis of the birth and death of slavery and the Jim Crow Era in the United States. This is important because it shows the pattern of disguising systems as something different while maintaining the same oppressive behaviors. This is the phenomena that Aristotle talks about when he gives the advice on how to preserve a tyranny. In order to preserve the tyranny of white supremacy in the United States, white elites have continued to disguise systems until they became what we know call Mass Incarceration. Mass Incarceration is the New Jim Crow and the parallels between the systems will be shown. The War on Drugs is what enabled the elite class to create Mass Incarceration which is the primary

example of how concepts are introduced as being positive but really have the nature of maintaining oppression.

Slavery

In order to understand how slavery has turned into mass incarceration we must analyze the birth and death of slavery. When the Europeans came to the US, the Black people they brought along were not seen as their enemies- those we the American Indians. Blacks and poor whites were brought to this country as indentured servants and the American Indians were seen as savages that needed to be eliminated because they had the ability to stop the conquering of land. The use of indentured servants did not last very long because the demand for labor increased,

> "The fear of raids by Indian tribes led plantation owners to grasp for an
> alternative source of free labor. European immigrants were also deemed poor
> candidates for slavery, not because of their race, but rather because they were
> in short supply and enslavement would, quite naturally, interfere with
> voluntary immigration to the new colonies" (Alexander 23-24).

With the Indians and the Europeans as invaluable options, the elite's only choice ended up being Black people as slaves. Life during those times was only good for the rich white elites, even the poor whites were treated almost as poorly as the slaves. This led to the poor whites, slaves, and indentured servants to unite and try to overthrow the elites but once plantation owners got word of the news of Bacon's Rebellion, they decided to create a divide between poor whites and Blacks by allowing the power whites to control the slaves. White people were able to justify slavery by creating the narrative that "Negros, like the Indians, were an uncivilized lesser race, perhaps even more lacking in intelligence and laudable human qualities than the red-skinned natives" (Alexander 25).

After the civil war the former slaves obviously left their plantations, and this caused the plantation owners to be fearful. They "believed African Americans lacked the proper motivation

to work, prompting the provisional Southern legislatures to adopt the notorious black codes" (Alexander 28). However, this was starting to prove false when after the Reconstruction Era began, Black people started becoming involved in politics. In 1870, "at least 15% of all southern elected officials were black. This is particularly extraordinary in light of the fact that 15 years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965- the high watermark of the Civil Rights movement- fewer than 8% of all southern elected officials were black" (Alexander 29). This is important because it proves that Black people had the ability to be involved in politics which would lessen the power of the white people. This decrease in power scared the white people and instigated the Black codes. After another 100 years of oppression, we can see that the Black community was not able to grow back to their potential. Knowing that they could not legally keep Black people from voting after the 15th amendment was passed, they instead imposed "poll taxes, literacy tests, and other devices to prevent black from voting" (Alexander 30). These tests were used to maintain oppression since Black people were denied wealth and education for almost 300 years.

The Jim Crow Era

With the death of slavery came the birth of the Jim Crow Era. The Jim Crow Era was merely a way of disguising slavery under more laws. Alexander explains that

> "Vagrancy laws and other laws defining activities such as "mischief" and "insulting gestures" as crimes were enforced vigorously against blacks. The aggressive enforcement of these criminal offences opened up an enormous market for convict leasing, in which prisoners were contracted out as laborers to the highest private bidder" (Alexander 31).

Apart from the Black people who were enslaved as a punishment for crime, poor whites and poor Blacks started to find commonalities again. Once again, the elite white people needed to find something to drive a wedge between them, like how they did so after Bacon's Rebellion. This wedge was segregation laws which Alexander calls "another racial caste system" (Alexander

35). In every way of life, Black people were discriminated against. From schools and churches to morgues and cemeteries, Black people were oppressed.

The death of the Jim Crow era is thought by scholars to be after the landmark supreme court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education.* Others trace it to the fact that "the blatant contradiction between the country's opposition to the crimes of the Third Reich against European Jews and the continued existence of a racial caste system in the United States was proving embarrassing, severely damaging the nation's credibility as leader of the "free world" (Alexander 36). While it took another 20 years, the Civil Rights Movement peaked in the 1960s. During this time there was anti-poverty rhetoric that politicians used to their benefit. The Civil Rights Movement started to combine and move into more of a Poor People's Movement, where white poverty and black poverty were both an issue. Martin Luther King Jr wanted to get rid of economic inequality, which once again bands the multiracial poor people together. The people "committed to racial hierarchy were forced to search for new means of achieving their goals according to the new rules of American democracy" (Alexander 40). This commitment led to the usage of the rhetoric ""law and order" rather than "segregation forever"" (Alexander 40).

<u>The Birth of the New Jim Crow: How the "War on Drugs" Was Used to Maintain Oppression</u>
With the unification of the poor whites and Blacks, there needed to be a new wedge which was the use of the rhetoric "law and order". Conservatives, beginning in the mid 1950s, used law and order by "arguing that Martin Luther King Jr.'s philosophy of civil disobedience was a leading cause of crime" (Alexander 41). The term was seen as a positive term that had the connotations of ridding the communities of drug related crime. Those who opposed the civil rights legislation created the Republican party and continued to use rhetoric not to liberate the community, but instead to build the new wedge between poor whites and Blacks. They created an image that

poverty for Black people was not because of structural factors but instead they focused the

narrative on Black culture:

> "The term "welfare queen" became a not-so-subtle code for "lazy, greedy,
> black ghetto mother." The food stamp program, in turn, was a vehicle to let
> "some fellow ahead of you buy a T-bone steak," while "you were standing in
> a checkout line with your package of hamburger." These highly racialized
> appeals, targeted to poor and working-class whites, were nearly always
> accompanied by vehement promises to be tougher on crime and to enhance
> the federal government's role in combating it" (Alexander 48).

This was all a tactic by the Reagan administration to get poor white people to leave the

Democratic party and join the Republican party. It ended up working and Reagan was elected

president. With his presidency, Reagan declared the War on Drugs. What is interesting to note is

that at the beginning of his presidency, "less than 2 percent of the American public viewed drugs

as the most important issue facing the nation. This fact was no deterrent to Reagan, for the drug

war from the outset had little to do with public concern about drugs and much to do with public

concern about race" (Alexander 49). As soon as Reagan declared the War on Drugs things

started to change and the budgets for the law enforcement agencies skyrocketed.[17] This had

nothing to do with drugs themselves because when other countries had this problem,

decriminalization of the drugs and money into drug treatment and prevention ended up being

more beneficial to decreasing crime.[18] However, this did not stop the Reagan administration and

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[17] "Between 1980 and 1984, FBI antidrug funding increased from $8 million to $95 million. Department of Defense antidrug allocations increased from $33 million in 1981 to $1,042 million in 1991. During that same period, DEA antidrug spending grew from $86 to $1,026 million, and FBI antidrug allocations grew from $38 to $181 million. By contrast, funding for agencies responsible for drug treatment, prevention, and education was dramatically reduced. The budget of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, for example, was reduced from $274 million to $57 million from 1981 to 1984, and antidrug funds allocated to the Department of Education were cut from $14 million to $3 million." (Alexander 49)

[18] "Portugal, for example, responded to persistent problems of drug addiction and abuse by decriminalizing the possession of all drugs and redirecting the money that would have been spent putting drug users in cages into drug treatment and prevention. Ten years later, Portugal reported that rates of drug abuse and addiction had plummeted, and drug-related crime was on the decline as well" (Alexander 51).

> "September 1986, with the media frenzy at full throttle, the House passed legislation that allocated $2 billion to the antidrug crusade, required the participation of the military in narcotics control efforts, allowed the death penalty for some drug-related crimes, and authorized the admission of some illegally obtained evidence in drug trials. Later that month, the Senate proposed even tougher antidrug legislation, and shortly thereafter, the president signed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 into law. Among other harsh penalties, the legislation included mandatory minimum sentences for the distribution of cocaine, including far more severe punishment for distribution of crack—associated with blacks—than powder cocaine, associated with whites" (Alexander 53).[19]

With the increase on being tough on crime that clearly targeted Black people, the incarceration rates increased exponentially and "one fourth of young African American men were now under the control of the criminal justice system" (Alexander 56). Incarceration rates did not slow down, instead when Clinton became president, they increased more than they have under any other presidency. Under Clinton's presidency a few things he did was create the TANF, redirect funding to prison construction, and implement the One Strike and You're Out initiative.[20] Over 2

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[19] "The new Anti-Drug Abuse Act authorized public housing authorities to evict any tenant who allows any form of drug-related criminal activity to occur on or near public housing premises and eliminated many federal benefits, including student loans, for anyone convicted of a drug offense. The act also expanded use of the death penalty for serious drug-related offenses and imposed new mandatory minimums for drug offenses, including a five-year mandatory minimum for simple possession of cocaine base—with no evidence of intent to sell. Remarkably, the penalty would apply to first-time offenders. The severity of this punishment was unprecedented in the federal system. Until 1988, one year of imprisonment had been the maximum for possession of any amount of any drug" (Alexander 53).

[20] "He signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which "ended welfare as we know it," and replaced it with a block grant to states called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). TANF imposed a five-year lifetime limit on welfare assistance, as well as a permanent, lifetime ban on eligibility for welfare and food stamps for anyone convicted of a felony drug offense—including simple possession of marijuana" (Alexander 57).

"The dramatic shift toward punitiveness resulted in a massive reallocation of public resources. By 1996, the penal budget doubled the amount that had been allocated to AFDC or food stamps. Similarly, funding that had once been used for public housing was being redirected to prison construction" (Alexander 57).

"Clinton also made it easier for federally-assisted public housing projects to exclude anyone with a criminal history—an extraordinarily harsh step in the midst of a drug war aimed at racial and ethnic minorities. In his announcement of the "One Strike and You're Out" Initiative, Clinton explained: "From now on, the rule for residents who commit crime and peddle drugs should be one strike and you're out." The new rule promised to be "the toughest admission and eviction policy that HUD has implemented." Thus, for countless poor people,

million people were now behind bars and 90% of those admitted for drug offenses were black

and Latino and that is how the New Jim Crow was born (Alexander 58).

Alexander explains the War on Drugs as a vehicle of mass incarceration through 3 stages.

The first stage was the arrest of black people through drug operations in poor communities.[21] The

second stage was the denial of good representation which lead to the incarceration where every

aspect of their lives was controlled.[22] The third stage is the discrimination that anyone labelled as

a felon receives- employment, housing, education.[23] Because of the drug war, people in the

communities who were disproportionately affected are now able to be legally discriminated

against and very often fall into a cycle of being in and out of prison. There is no support for ex-

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particularly racial minorities targeted by the drug war, public housing was no longer available, leaving many of them homeless—locked out not only of mainstream society, but their own homes" (Alexander 57).

[21] "They are rewarded in cash—through drug forfeiture laws and federal grant programs—for rounding up as many people as possible, and they operate unconstrained by constitutional rules of procedure that once were considered inviolate. Police can stop, interrogate, and search anyone they choose for drug investigations, provided they get "consent." Because there is no meaningful check on the exercise of police discretion, racial biases are granted free reign. In fact, police are allowed to rely on race as a factor in selecting whom to stop and search (even though people of color are no more likely to be guilty of drug crimes than whites)—effectively guaranteeing that those who are swept into the system are primarily black and brown" (Alexander 180).

[22] "Once arrested, defendants are generally denied meaningful legal representation and pressured to plead guilty whether they are or not. Prosecutors are free to "load up" defendants with extra charges, and their decisions cannot be challenged for racial bias. Once convicted, due to the drug war's harsh sentencing laws, drug offenders in the United States spend more time under the criminal justice system's formal control—in jail or prison, on probation or parole—than drug offenders anywhere else in the world. While under formal control, virtually every aspect of one's life is regulated and monitored by the system, and any form of resistance or disobedience is subject to swift sanction. This period of control may last a lifetime, even for those convicted of extremely minor, nonviolent offenses, but the vast majority of those swept into the system are eventually released. They are transferred from their prison cells to a much larger, invisible cage" (Alexander 181).

[23] "The final stage has been dubbed by some advocates as the period of invisible punishment. This term, first coined by Jeremy Travis, is meant to describe the unique set of criminal sanctions that are imposed on individuals after they step outside the prison gates, a form of punishment that operates largely outside of public view and takes effect outside the traditional sentencing framework. These sanctions are imposed by operation of law rather than decisions of a sentencing judge, yet they often have a greater impact on one's life course than the months or years one actually spends behind bars. These laws operate collectively to ensure that the vast majority of convicted offenders will never integrate into mainstream, white society. They will be discriminated against, legally, for the rest of their lives—denied employment, housing, education, and public benefits. Unable to surmount these obstacles, most will eventually return to prison and then be released again, caught in a closed circuit of perpetual marginality" (Alexander 181).

felons, instead there is a stigma that makes the ex-felons "members of an undercaste", which created once again a new racial caste system where the primary concern is control (Alexander 181-183). The term "law and order" was ultimately the slippery concept that created this new racial caste system.

Similarities between Mass Incarceration and The Jim Crow Era

The idea that we change things so that everything stays the same is apparent in the systems of slavery, the Jim Crow Era, and mass incarceration, where they were created to maintain the hierarchal racial power of the elite whites. While it is very apparent on how the Jim Crow Era was merely an extension of slavery, many people do not see how the US criminal justice system is another extension. The thought that mass incarceration through the War on Drugs, using terms like "law and order", is the New Jim Crow might sound shocking to some. In Chapter 5 of *The New Jim Crow*, Alexander maps the parallels between Jim Crow and mass incarceration, and I will briefly discuss these parallels and then connect this phenomenon to what Aristotle presents as some of the main strategies to preserving a tyranny, as we saw in Chapter 2.

The historical parallels are apparent in the fact that their origins politically are similar. Alexander explains that during the Jim Crow Era it would be a competition between conservatives on who can make the most oppressive Jim Crow legislation, and during the War on Drugs politicians made it a competition on who can be the toughest on crime. Then there is the fact that they are both forms of legalized discrimination which is apparent in the fact that ex-drug offenders face the same discrimination when it comes to housing, education, employment, voting, and public benefits, that occurred during segregation. The discrimination in voting leads to political disenfranchisement where during Jim Crow they would use devices such as literacy tests and poll taxes which brought the result of a white electoral (legally), and now even though prisoners do

not get to vote, they are still counted in the census which inflates the population in white rural areas and as a benefit those areas get more congressional seats. While these, including exclusion from juries and lack of defense to the law, are more apparent, the more conspicuous parallels are racial segregation and the symbolic production of race. Alexander argues that racial segregation in the forms of prisons is more extreme because there are literal bars and walls segregated a large chunk of the Black population. There is also the added fact that poor Black communities are extremely impoverished and are vastly different than poor white communities, because the government will not do anything about it. When it comes to race, these systems have defined what it means to be black. During slavery being black meant you were a slave, while during Jim Crow being Black meant you were a second-class citizen, and during mass incarceration being black means that you are a criminal (Alexander 185-195).[24]

In *Politics V* 10-11, as we saw in Chapter 2 above, Aristotle gives strategies to preserve a tyranny such as eliminating the high-minded men, keeping a lookout for things that give rise to high-mindedness and mutual trust, prohibiting schools and keeping people as ignorant as possible, and pitting people against each other. These strategies can be seen in the way that the racial caste systems were maintained. Black people were denied education or wealth for so many centuries that they were forced into the narrative of being lesser than. Tension and hatred were created between poor blacks and poor whites so that they would never be able to revolt against the elites. Then by segregating and incarcerating them, they are kept out of the political decisions so that politics will never be able to reflect what would benefit their community. The parallels between how Aristotle claims one can preserve a tyranny and how the United States has created

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[24] For a more in-depth discussion on the historical parallels read Chapter 5 "The New Jim Crow" section "Mapping the Parallels".

systems that maintain the oppressive behaviors towards the Black community are uncanny. We have succumbed to the trick.

As Alexander's analysis shows, an important part of the process consists in rhetorical strategies to make people feel that things have changed. This is the ultimate point of a slippery concept. As we have seen through "post-racial society," "inclusion," and "law and order," these phrases were meant to portray a society that is unified and has everyone's best interests in mind. Instead, we see that this is not the case because the original definition and purpose of those terms are reversed and degraded into maintaining oppression. This could be because people have different interpretations of what they mean, but it is more likely that they are used to allow the status quo to continue.

Conclusion: How to Pursue Core Values without Losing their True Meaning

The question now is what can we do as citizens to avoid having our ideals slip into lies or tools for further oppression? What are some useful strategies that can prevent this phenomenon that I have called "the trick" of reversal and deterioration of value concepts from occurring? The first strategy would be to raise *awareness* about the slippery nature of ethical and political concepts and about how often politicians use this feature to make things look different while they are not. Awareness of this phenomena and of the corresponding rhetorical strategies would allow us to identify more easily when we are losing track of our true values and of the ways in which apparently new concepts hide inside the content and structures of old concepts. While awareness of the phenomena needs to be supported and promoted by intellectuals (philosophers) and leaders, it is important that the awareness occurs at all social levels and that most citizens are vigilant about the dangers of the slippery concepts. This is a second strategy that we can employ to avoid the trick: cultivate civic participation in conversations about values and social ideals, and promote a certain *skepticism* and critical attitude, so that citizens can keep each other in check. The combination of civic awareness and civic skepticism aims at avoiding some of the problems that traditional epistocracies (such as those I discuss in Chapter 2) might encounter and at establishing some minimum conditions for a proper deliberative democracy.

To explain how to produce the relevant civic awareness, I have offered examples of how the trick tends to be obscure even to those who are critical and engaged in discussions about the concepts. The prime example I have analyzed of a value that has lost its truth and ends up creating concepts that hide behind old ones is "law and order," a slogan that led to mass incarceration as a new form of slavery. A decade before Michelle Alexander wrote her book,

while she was on her way to her job at the ACLU, she saw a poster that said, "The Drug War is the New Jim Crow", and as a Black female activist, even she thought that was a radical and crazy idea (Alexander 3). If someone who spent her life trying to combat the racial biases of the criminal justice system thought the connection between the War on Drugs and the Jim Crow policies was radical, then surely people who are not as involved in this topic would still think this is radical. Therefore, creating awareness about this trick is important, so that more people can be more alert to the ways in which some of the things that are normalized today might hide transformed versions of crooked policies and notions from the past. In recent times, social movements such as Black Lives Matter, have produced some of this relevant awareness to the slippery nature of some of our political concepts.[25]

While awareness of the phenomena needs to be supported and promoted by intellectuals (philosophers) and leaders, it is important that the awareness occurs at all social levels and that most citizens are vigilant about the dangers of the slippery concepts. In his book "Against Epistocracy" Gunn argues against the elitist defense of epistocracy (such as Brennan (2016)) and he suggests that this kind of elitism neglects the fact that public policy is very complex. I argue something similar in that simple epistocracy neglects the facts that many of the value concepts that are promoted in society are slippery. In order to have a system that works, we must develop tools to handle these slippery concepts and remind us of the fact that they can be turned from positive into negative and harmful. Consequently, we must theorize a system with the knowledge that what we say can be manipulated and reversed, not necessarily always in a bad way, but because we have different perspectives based on our epistemological standpoint.

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[25] It is interesting that even though Black Lives Matter can bring awareness to the problem of slippery concepts, it also succumbs to the trick when people give it different definitions i.e., "All Lives Matter".

The solution might not be epistocracy, but it is not necessarily deliberative democracy in how we see it today. As we have seen in Michelle Alexander's monograph, a large part of the population, specifically the Black community is imprisoned and have been stripped of their right to vote. In a true deliberative democracy, everyone is given a voice. When a whole race's voice is taken away by institutionalization, there can never be a true deliberative democracy. I believe that there needs to be more regulation on imprisonment, where minority communities are not disproportionately taken advantage of. There also needs to be a way to try and undo the harm that the War on Drugs, did and continues to do, to the Black and Latino communities. If epistocracy and democracy are not the solution, maybe a mix of the two, or a completely new government could be the solution.

Philosophers, from Socrates to Sarah Ahmed, have often brought this awareness to how positive concepts are used to oppress, but there should be an increase in this literature in conjuncture to how it occurs in the United States political system. It is important that citizens have a critical eye in general so that we can develop some sort of healthy skepticism. By being critical and skeptical, we will be able to acquire the tools to detect tricky uses of value concepts. This will help prevent positive concepts from being degraded and reversed, and lead to better political outcomes for everyone, not just a specific racial group.

While this awareness and skepticism is the first step, we must ultimately find a more permanent solution as to how to dismantle the racial caste system that occurs today through mass incarceration, and how to prevent a new racial caste system from arising once again.

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