

**Ten questions about the meaning of democracy;
Answers informed by the science of political psychology.**

by William A. McConochie, Ph.D.
Politicalpsychologyresearch.com.
71 E. 15th Ave. Eugene, Or. 97401
Bill@politicalpsychologyresearch.com
Copyright 2007. File: Essay on democracy 10 questions.

Stanley Fish, a prominent intellectual and professor of English and related subjects (e.g. political science, criminal justice and religious studies), was interviewed by the BBC for a program to be aired starting October 8, 2007. His answers were based apparently on his knowledge of linguistics, philosophy and his personal opinions.

His answers appeared in the New York Times, Oct. 7. He invited readers to criticize and offer contrary opinions, as by joining the conversation online at www.whymdemocracy.net and www.myspace.com/whymdemocracy.

I am a psychologist specializing in political psychology, the study of human traits related to political matters. My opinions below are informed by my research findings, published on my web site, politicalpsychologyresearch.com.

1. What is the biggest threat to democracy? Answer: Alternative forms of government, e.g. anarchy (no organized government, with roving bands of militants doing whatever they want), military dictatorship, monarchy, and public democracy, defined as government serving the best interests of the community overall. Current democracies, may be described as tribal democracies, governments of elected representatives who serve tribes of special interest groups (e.g. business, industry, teachers, the elderly, labor unions).
2. Can terrorism destroy democracy? Answer: Unlikely in the long run, as only a tiny fraction of citizens endorse anarchy, the most likely result of endless terrorism. But, temporary terrorism can frighten citizens, making them more attracted to authoritarianism and related forms of government, e.g. military dictatorships and tribal democracies. Frightened people want powerful leaders to protect them. A classic example of a democracy deteriorating into a military dictatorship was Nazi Germany. Hitler was elected to office. He then usurped power to replace the current democratic government with a military dictatorship. A similar process may have characterized G. W. Bush's attempt to minimize checks and balances on his authority as president.
3. Are dictators ever good? Answer: Perhaps for some (e.g. those citizens who do the bidding of the dictator), but often not for many in the long run. Humans, if given a choice, tend to prefer democratic governments over more centralized forms of government such as monarchies and dictatorships. People like to have a say in things that influence their lives. Nazi Germany delighted many citizens initially but eventually disgusted and destroyed the majority. Dictatorship may be better than anarchy, as it can

provide greater stability than anarchy. However, dictatorship is less desirable than democratic government, given the history of atrocities often characteristic of military dictatorships. And dictatorship is much less strongly endorsed by citizens than democracy. In Iraq, dictatorship under Saddam Hussein provided more stability than the civil war that has characterized that nation in the several years since his forced demise. However, few would say his dictatorship was an ideal form of government. For example, he has a very high score on warmongering-proneness.

4. Is democracy for everyone? Answers:

A. Government that gives citizens direct and meaningful voice in forming the policies and programs of government seems to be the ideal toward which humans strive, as reflected in the percentages of persons who endorse various forms of government. For example, in the United States a much higher percent endorse tribal democracy over anarchy, military dictatorship or monarchy. But, among two forms of democracy, only 20 percent endorse our current form of democracy, tribal democracy, while 90 percent endorse public democracy, government serving the best interests of the community overall versus special interest groups.

B. Modern democracies of even the tribal sort require many viable social structures to function. Until and unless a country has these structures in place, democratic government will be premature. These structures include respect for community laws, courts that enforce laws, stable political parties and voting mechanisms, civil peace (versus civil war), and free media avenues for conducting election campaigns. For example, because Iraq is torn by continuing civil war based on centuries of religious civil conflict, it may not be ready for democracy.

C. One can define two very different forms of democracy, tribal and public. Tribal democracy is compatible with warmongering. For example, persons higher on the warmongering trait tend to endorse both military dictatorships and tribal democracies. They do not endorse the public democracy model of government. A nation that is prone to warmongering will be interested in tribal democracy but not public democracy. A peace-loving nation will probably be more interested in public democracy than tribal democracy. For the United States to export tribal democracy is not in its best interests, as this form of democracy is vulnerable to leaders of a warmongering bent. The U.S. should not promote warmongering in nations that could then wage war alone or with other nations against the U.S. or its allies. For the U.S. to export public democracy would be in the best interests of all nations, as the public democracy model of government is endorsed by pro-social citizens, e.g. those who support human rights, sustainable policies and programs and a positive and peaceful foreign policy. But until the U.S. itself matures into a public democracy it is unlikely to command the respect necessary to "sell" this model of government to other nations.

5. Is God democratic? Answer. The concept "God" and related religious beliefs in general tend to exist in humans in two different forms. Specifically, these may be defined as the "Fundamentalist" and "Kindly Beliefs" forms. The Fundamentalist form of religious beliefs is anti-social in many respects. For example, Fundamentalism includes

the beliefs that God punishes wrong doers and that humans should compete with each other. Those who hold these beliefs tend to endorse warmongering and violence-proneness. They do not endorse human rights, sustainable policies and programs or a positive foreign policy. The Kindly Beliefs form of religion, in contrast, is pro-social. For persons of this orientation, God is forgiving of wrong doers. They believe people should cooperate and compromise to get along. Persons higher on this trait tend not to endorse warmongering. They endorse human rights, sustainable policies and programs and a positive foreign policy. Thus, we can expect that God for Fundamentalists is more prone to military dictatorships and tribal democracies while God for those of the Kindly Religious Beliefs form of religion is more compatible with the public democracy model of government.

6. Can God solve climate change? Answer: From a scientific viewpoint, God can be studied only as a worldly phenomenon, not as a supernatural being. Supernatural beings by definition are not observable in the natural world. Science deals with the observable world. Therefore, "God" can only be studied scientifically as a human concept or belief. Research shows that persons of the Fundamentalist orientation (see item 5, above) tend to eschew science if it conflicts with their religious beliefs. They also tend to disavow sustainable policies and programs. Therefore, we can expect them to view their God as indifferent to global warming or other threats to human civilization. In contrast persons of the Kindly Beliefs orientation do not eschew science and endorse sustainable policies and programs. We can expect that they will see their God as supporting efforts to curb global warming, air and water pollution and similar threats to life on earth.

7. Are women more democratic than men? Answer: Yes. For example, there is a slight but significant correlation between gender and endorsement of public democracy. This is not to say that men do not support public democracy. Most men do, and more strongly than any other form of government. But women are slightly more likely to than men.

8. Who or what rules the world? Answer: This question is so general and abstract that one can answer it from many perspectives. If we were to ask citizens this question, giving them many options, such as God, humans without divine guidance, humans with divine guidance, governments, large international corporations, men, women, etc. we could anticipate answers in line with prior research. For example, we could offer the following guesses or hypotheses:

A. Fundamentalists will be more likely than those of the Kindly Beliefs orientation to answer "God", and "men".

B. Fundamentalists will be more likely than others to answer "humans with divine guidance."

C. Persons low on religiousness and valuing religion personally (two measurable traits) will be more likely to answer "governments" and "corporations".

Until we do the research, we can't be sure.

9. What would make you start a revolution? Answer: The current state of the world. I personally believe from my research findings that human civilization is progressing from

more primitive to more sophisticated forms of government, in modern democracies from tribal democracy toward public democracy. I publish my research findings on my web site (politicalpsychologyresearch.com) in the interest of furthering and facilitating this progress, which some citizens will find refreshingly "revolutionary", or perhaps more appropriately "evolutionary". I don't think it will require violence to progress to this next form of democracy.

10. Whom would you vote for as President of the World? Answer: No one. "President of the world" implies an authoritarian leader that would be good for everyone everywhere. Authoritarianism is strongly associated with warmongering and other anti-social traits. Therefore, it is much too dangerous to endorse as an aspect of government.

While it might be an attractive fantasy to wish for a "savior" to simplify the task of governing nations, we the people must do the work.

Specifically, my research findings lead me to have much confidence in the pro-social citizens of the world, which appear to constitute about 90 percent. In contrast, anti-social types constitute only about 5 or 6 percent. The anti-social types all tend to think alike, bow to authoritarianism and are thus very easily organized and led in politics and warmongering. The pro-social types are very diverse in their thinking, do not bow to authoritarianism and therefore are harder to organize politically.

Thus, we have challenging work ahead to design effective political parties that will empower the pro-social majority politically so they can groom and promote pro-social candidates for elective political office, candidates who will serve the best interests of the community overall, the "common good", defined democratically by well-designed, comprehensive and repeated public opinion polls.

End.