

Bruce Thornton: In antiquity before the rise of the Greek city states, the power resides in the charisma of individual men. What the Greeks created, which was innovation, was to take power, distribute it among citizens and limit it by the rules and protocols of decision making for the state. Now, power belongs to the collective citizenry. Now they are a minority of the people at the time, obviously. They do not include women in a political capacity, does not include slaves, does not include resident aliens. But this is a radical transformation. All other consensual governments from that point on, including the United States, go back to that original innovation. And even today, autocracies call themselves the Democratic Republic. It's the Democratic Republic of North Korea. That hypocrisy, that virtue -- vice pays to virtue, because they understand now that this is globally the only acceptable form of governance, even when they don't practice it themselves. So that's monumental in terms of the development of western civilization.

Bruce Thornton: As the ancient Greeks' innovation of dramatic tragedy shows, they saw human beings as flawed by their passions, particularly the passions of violence and the passions of sexuality. And so any organization, political organization of their state, was founded on that premise, that people will be excessive in their passions and particularly people who are given power. It's not if they will abuse power, it is simply when they will abuse power. So one of the innovations in ancient Athens was to fragment power among many different magistracies, ministries, etc. But also to impose term limits of one year on any office, and then hold that office holder to accountability in a very intrusive audit at the end of their term, because they distrusted power and they distrusted power because they distrusted human nature.

Bruce Thornton: Well, the United States or any polity should assume at the outset that the same flaws of human nature exist everywhere, that men desire power, when they have power they will abuse it, they will use power for their own interest. Likewise with the state, any state has its interest, it will pursue those interests not on the basis usually of ideals, but on the basis of the interest of that state, its security, its material interest, and if it's a representative government of any sort, in the interest of the citizenry who are going to vote for them. So we should not predicate our relations with other states, assuming that they have the same ideals as we have or any ideals whatsoever. That's a very powerful lesson that Thucydides, the great historian of the Peloponnesian War, and still 2400 years later, the greatest political philosopher for understanding state behavior, particularly in conflict, do not assume that because we desire peace, that another nation or another people desire peace. They may or they may not. Finally, the corollary of this insight is that force will always be the most important instrument of protecting our interest and our security, and we can never create a world in which force will be marginalized or will disappear.

Bruce Thornton: James Madison in Federalist 10, which is for the United States, probably the most significant political philosophy, said that people break into factions and they break into factions based on passions and interests. Passions for the founders primarily but was not limited to confessional differences. They were all Christians, but you had very different denominations that could cause conflict. Remember, they had just come from they end less than 100 years earlier of the Thirty Years' War, which was devastating in Europe. So Madison said that these factions are sewn in the nature of man. They're sewn in the nature of man. That is, they are as much a permanent part of what we are as our need to eat or reproduce or be safe. So we should always assume that the people that we have to interact with on the international stage are subject to the same sorts of passions and interests. It's very interesting, he never says that these factions are based on policy differences. As we seem to think today that it's all about policy differences. He doesn't say factions are created by policy differences. He says they're created by passions and

interests, and interests are, and he's very specific about this, interests are the different capacities for acquiring property and the differences in property among people which create envy and resentment and create two permanent factions within any polity. So what we call income inequality and see as a problem that can be solved, James Madison would have thought, "That's lunatic, you're not going to solve that problem," because the abilities, the talents, the hard work, the virtues, or even the luck of different people are going to mean there's going to be differences in property. Robert Conquest, in a very great essay that he wrote during the Soviet era about diplomacy, and he said the biggest mistake that you can make conducting diplomacy is to assume that the person across the table from you has the same interests as you have, that they desire the same things. So if we sat down across from the Soviets, we might assume, well the Soviets want peace, they don't want their citizens killed in wars, they want affluence or at least a certain level of material existence. But it's clear from their behavior, during their whole period, that they also desire domination. Marxism was an ideology of world domination. After 1945, Stalin made it very clear to all the *comintern*, the communist parties throughout the world including in this country, that just because we had cooperated with the capitalists to defeat Hitler does not mean we are entering an era of cooperation. We still believe in the worldwide destiny of communist hegemony, and too many people in this country thought, "Well, they don't really believe that." And Conquest, it bears reading because he reminds us don't sit across, say, from the Iranians and think, "Well, the Iranians want to get along in the world, they want to solve their economic problems, they want peace with their neighbors," when it's very clear because they've been telling us since 1979 that this is a Shi'a apocalyptic cult waiting for the hidden Madhi to return, which will ignite a worldwide conflict, which will end with the domination of Islam in the world. And we may think that that's ridiculous and absurd, but it doesn't matter what we think. It's what they think and that's what their behavior is predicated on. So when we come along and sit down across the table with them, we will err if we don't understand that they are simply using diplomacy as what Conquest called a technical adjunct to their other true aims.

Bruce Thornton: In the ancient Greek democracy, particularly that of Athens, it's great glory is to replace force in political affairs with language: debates in the assembly, debates in the council, the two governing bodies of ancient Athens. And rather than a big man, like the King of Persia, saying, "This will be done" and everybody will say, "Oh great King, that's a wonderful idea, let's do that," you have very contentious debates among the citizens, and that is the great gift that we always want to be appreciative of because that is an advance from violence to language and argument is much superior. However, the problem with language is that often it can become a substitute for action, and one of the mechanisms of appeasement is to substitute diplomatic engagement when action is unpalatable, either through fear or either through voter disinclination, a situation I think that we're facing today. So in antiquity, when Philip the II of Macedon in 358 became king of Macedon, the northern, sort of like the Wild West in the United States in the 19th century, not taken seriously at the beginning by the other Greek states. And he started a program of aggression that would end up in 338, the Battle of Chaeronea with all the Greek states losing their political freedom because they are now subject to the authority and power of Macedon. And one of the mechanisms for achieving that was to engage in diplomatic discourse that could be drawn out, particularly back then when travel time was so much more lengthy than it is for us. You couldn't hop on a plane obviously. You had to travel on horseback or walk. So ambassadors would be sent to his Philip's court at Pella with a deal, but it would take weeks before then it would come back, and then of course it had to be debated in the assembly, where everybody, every citizen, rich, poor, whatever, had a right to speak. So the process becomes even more lengthy. Meanwhile while all this talk is going on, Philip is continuing his program of aggression. He's creating facts on the ground that will change whatever the diplomatic arrangement is, and he brilliantly exploited that and by the way, all subsequent aggressors have done the same thing.

Diplomacy then becomes a tool for an aggressor to masquerade his intentions and if the other side isn't really inclined towards a confrontation of physical violence, they find it convenient too, to pretend that they are doing something, they're talking, and when in fact, they don't want to do something. And this is a sort of dynamic that you can see repeated historically that usually ends up bad for the people who think that they can solve with words a conflict that is going to be have to be solved by violence.

Bruce Thornton: Well, the strength of a democracy, as we see it in ancient Greece, is that power is distributed. The ancient Greeks were obsessed with tyrant, the "tyrannus," the man who accumulates personal power and then abuses it by taking the property of citizens, having secret police that spy on them, executions, even ravaging their wives and daughters. So if you distribute power among the people, then it has less corruption by any one person, because you have to create a sort of coalition, a faction so to speak, which does happen, but it is more difficult because it's countered by another faction. So that's a very important lesson for us, that power has to be balanced, it has to be distributed, in a sense diluted, and when it's concentrated, that's when the danger happens because then it's at the whim of any individual person who, being flawed as all humans are flawed, will eventually abuse that power.

Bruce Thornton: Political freedom, as understood going all the way back to the Greek political philosophers, was the freedom to become a virtuous citizen without interference from anything or anybody else. It was the opportunity to become the best a human could become living collectively in a political community. What has happened is that political freedom has evolved into what the founders called license, and this problem was very important to them, and they constantly talk about it in the constitutional debates. In licenses, I do what I want, but if we do what I want, that's not true freedom in their point of view. That's not going to make you into a fulfilled human being both personally and politically. You are going to be reduced to the level of an animal because what we will want to do, given our flawed human nature, is to gratify our passions and appetites, and when that happens, that facilitates the loss of freedom. We are then enslaved to our appetites and we're not truly free, and that's what frightened Aristotle, Plato, James Madison, the founders, was that transition, and that transition has happened in the United States, for example, because of our increasing wealth and our increasing leisure, which gives us scope to decide our sexual behavior should not be limited or restricted, it should answer only to our own will, that is to unleash centripetal forces that will destroy a society eventually.

Bruce Thornton: The Declaration of Independence set out the foundational belief, which is that all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their creator with inalienable rights, and this is important because rights are not gifts of any power, of any governmental power. They're not the gifts of a king. They are inherent in our human nature. The Constitution was the mechanism that would achieve the expression of those rights. So the ideal is the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution is the nuts and bolts of how you can create a political organization that would enshrine those beliefs. So it's means and ends. The ends is political freedom so that people can enjoy those natural rights as they called them. The Constitution are the specific governmental institutions and structures and offices that will ensure that political freedom.

Bruce Thornton: If political freedom is not to do what I want, however unvirtuous or vicious, but rather to become a good citizen, then political freedom depends on civic virtue. It depends on a recognition that we behave in certain ways because we are citizens bound to our fellow citizens and to our future citizens, to act in certain ways that protect freedom, that minimize the destructive forces within us particularly that damage freedom. So you really can't have political freedom without civic virtue. Now I don't want to say that the founders believed that they created a

Constitution that would make people virtuous, but they did the best they could to keep concentrated power from reducing people to dependency where their only virtue is to obey power rather than to rule themselves. So to rule ourselves, to have autonomy as citizens, we have to have certain virtues. For example, the most important virtue, and it was the most important virtue in ancient Greece, is self-control, virtuous self-control. That is not doing things, not because we don't feel those impulses, but that we know that they are destructive to ourselves and to our community and so we have the ability not to act on the impulse, and without that, and without that being reinforced by the whole society, not just a structure of the Constitution, by the whole society, then you can't have a long lasting political community. It will tear itself apart.

Bruce Thornton: Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* had an important statement about the tendency of democracies to prefer short term interests and to neglect long term interests, particularly in foreign policy. And he said that democratic citizens tend to see present discomfort as more significant than future discomfort, because it's the present's right now, the future is far distant. And in foreign policy, that's dangerous because foreign policy requires anticipation of the consequences of actions we take today. Part of this reflects the election cycle. In our system of government, that's every two years. In ancient Athens, it's every year and because our election cycle is so brief, that promotes short-term interests. And for example, a miracle, the policy of containment that was long-term multi-decade, but I would say that was only because of mutually assured destruction. That was powerful enough a threat to get people's attention that they would commit, and even then, the appeasement of the Soviet Union that we call Détente or the demonstrations against putting the missiles in Europe to counter the Soviet Union. We had to fight against our own citizens and factions to make that work. Absent that, as what's going on in the Middle East today, people aren't thinking about what happens if Iran has a nuclear bomb in a region in which most of the world's critical energy source exists. There's going to be nuclear proliferation. There's going to be eventually a use of nuclear weapons or a handoff of nuclear weapons to terrorists. That's all science fiction for a lot of people. That's all in the future. All we know right now is, "Well, we're not over there, our soldiers are not over there getting killed, we don't have to deal with it," and that's the danger. It's hard to think ahead. Demosthenes, the great Athenian orator, had a wonderful metaphor. When he was trying to rally the Athenians to resist Philip, he says, 'You Athenians, you do foreign policy the way a barbarian boxes. He doesn't anticipate where the blow is going to come. Wherever you hit him, there his hands go.' What you have to do is anticipate in the future where the challenge is going to come and begin to prepare for it, and this is difficult for democracy to do.