

Democracy as practiced in some of the cities of ancient Greece meant that rich male landowners gathered to create and enforce laws for all the residents of their cities. This was an imperfect system of direct democracy because only prominent males were allowed to vote. It is referred to as a system of *direct democracy* because all persons entitled to vote gathered in the assembly to create laws.

St. Thomas Aquinas first suggested the idea for our system of modern representative democracy in his 1267 work *De Regno (On Kingship)*. Aquinas proposed that the best form of government would be one in which the citizens would be represented by “the best and presided over by one.” In a representative democracy we elect persons (hopefully “the best” available) who will represent us in a legislative assembly and select one leader who will preside (be president).

The political philosophers who provided the blueprints for America’s Founding Fathers were primarily John Locke, Charles de Montesquieu, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (see the earlier section on “liberty” for a discussion of the particular contribution made by each of these philosophers). The German philosopher Immanuel

Kant added an interesting dimension to the defense of democracy with his 1795 essay “Project for a Perpetual Peace.” Kant’s argument was that the spread of democracy would promote peace because democracies would not go to war against one another. This democratic peace thesis continues to have many adherents even in the twenty-first century. In fact, President George Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have used the democratic peace thesis as justification for America’s push for democratic transitions in the Middle East.

Democratic values were enshrined in Chapter 1 of the United Nations Charter with the inclusion of a “right of self determination” among its list of fundamental human rights. Sir Winston Churchill, speaking before the House of Commons on November 11, 1947, said, “Democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried.”

*Sanctity of Life:* Some Lincoln-Douglas debaters will argue that life itself should be regarded as the highest value. Accordingly, any action that preserves human life should be regarded as worthy and any action that results in the loss of human life should be regarded as unworthy.

*Quality of Life:* Is life itself more important than the quality of life? Many Americans now complete living wills, declaring that they do not wish to have heroic measures taken to preserve their lives if doing so would mean living with little or no quality of life. Proponents of euthanasia go further than this, arguing that doctors and patients should have the right to terminate life if continued life means unending pain and suffering.