

Problem 6 : ‘What is the best “flavor” of politics?’

Essentially the same structural forms of politics can nevertheless take on very different ‘flavors.’ For example, a dictatorship (or any system in which power is overwhelmingly concentrated in the hands of a few and from whom that power cannot easily be removed) can, in theory, be brutal, benign, or benevolent; anarchy can, in theory, consist of ‘mutual aid’ or a ‘war of all against all’ that proceeds in the absence of any rule of law whatsoever; democracies can and typically are distinguished in terms of the extent to which they are socially oriented (and so taxed accordingly in order to fund socially oriented programs, including all the state administrative apparatus that these programs entail) as opposed to individualistically oriented (and so taxed accordingly in order to fund a more minimal state apparatus, including more minimal administrative and social services). Thus, whatever our answer to the ‘What is the best structural form of politics?’ question, we still want to know what ‘flavor’ this structural form of politics ought to have since (political) structure, by itself, does not determine (political) content. Indeed, this is precisely why we vote *within* a democratic *structure*: to determine the ‘flavor’ — or, in other terms, the *content* — we want that democratic structure to have (at least for the next few years!). Ideally, then, we want a truly General Ethics to provide an explicit answer to the question not only of the kind of political structure that we ought to endorse but also of the kind of ‘flavor’ that that political structure ought to have.