



Sic Semper Tyrannis the Philosophy of Law and the Right to Fight Tyranny

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the philosophical underpinnings of the right to kill a tyrant within the framework of legal philosophy, examining its ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions. The discussion delineates major schools of legal philosophy—natural law (Grotius, Cicero), positive law (Aquinas, Bentham, Austin, Hart), utilitarian law (Hume, Bentham, Mill, Sidgwick), Marxist law (Marx, Engels), historical school (Montesquieu, Hugo, Savigny), sociological jurisprudence (Jhering, Gerber), and realist jurisprudence (Holmes, Llewellyn, Morgenthau)—while selectively employing all except positivist and realist approaches. Natural law, decoupled from divine origins by Grotius, prioritizes inherent human rights, whereas utilitarianism evaluates actions by their promotion of happiness, critiqued by Constant for subordinating principle to outcome. Tyrannicide evolves from class-based resistance in feudal societies to a democratic imperative in modernity, rooted in natural rights. The author laments the absence of "tyrant" definitions in contemporary constitutions (e.g., Ukrainian, U.S., French and etc.), viewing it as enabling elite manipulation. Advocating legislative reforms to permit tyrannicide, the paper warns against nihilism while affirming life's value, favoring imprisonment over execution in liberal states. Drawing on Boesche and Kelsen, it portrays justice as relativistic yet essential for democracy, urging ongoing discourse to safeguard freedoms.

Keywords: Tyrannicide, Philosophy of Law, Natural Law, Tyranny, Resistance Rights

INTRODUCTION

In the shadowed crucible of human history, where the chains of despotism clash against the unyielding anvil of resistance, the cry for liberation roars like a tempest across epochs. Sic semper tyrannis!—thus always to tyrants!—resounds the ancient Latin verdict, a clarion call that has toppled autocrats from Rome's bloodied forums to the guillotines of revolution. Tyranny, that monstrous hydra, feasts on the soul of nations, leaving only the husks of subjugated spirits. Yet, above every tyrant looms the Sword of Damocles, that fabled blade suspended by a single horsehair, whispering of the fragility of unchecked power. As the ancient tale recounts, Dionysius II of Syracuse (4th century BC) invited his courtier Damocles to sit upon his throne, only to reveal the ever-present peril dangling above—a metaphor for the tyrant's precarious existence, haunted by retribution's shadow. Freiheit muss besser bewaffnet sein als Tyrannei—freedom must be better armed than tyranny—echoes the German resolve, arming the spirit against oppression's iron grip.

Oh, ye oppressed, heed the revolutionary gospel that surges through time's veins! Paix aux chaumières, guerre aux palais!—peace to the cottages, war to the palaces!—thunders the French slogan from 1789's barricades, where the sans-culottes rose like a tidal wave to drown the ancien régime. Liberté, égalité, fraternité!—liberty, equality, fraternity!—shattered the divine right of kings, forging justice in the crucible of revolt. Aux armes, citoyens!—to arms, citizens!—summons the dispossessed, transforming despair into destiny. Vivre libre ou mourir!—live free or die!—demands the ultimate sacrifice, a covenant sealed in blood for an unfettered future. The Sword of Damocles swings low, reminding tyrants that no crown shields them from the people's wrath.

Tyranny is no relic; it lurks in power's corridors, cloaked in legitimacy, thriving on apathy. The

philosophy of law, far from a dusty tome, blazes as a torch, illuminating the path to righteous rebellion. *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*—who watches the watchers?—demands we probe the essence of justice, unravel the knowledge of right and wrong, and weigh the values that elevate humanity above brute force. The Damoclean blade hovers, a warning that power unchecked courts its own destruction.

In Russia's tormented saga, where steppe winds carry the serfs' lament and the thunder of uprisings, heroes have risen like comets against the autocratic night. Chronologically, they form a pantheon of defiance: Stepan Nikolayevich Khalturin (1856–1882), born in Vyatka Province, a carpenter-revolutionary who, in 1880, detonated a bomb in the Winter Palace, targeting Alexander II's throne to ignite proletarian revolt. Hanged in 1882, his act proved no palace is impregnable. Nikolai Ivanovich Kibalchich (1853–1881), the Chernigov-born inventor and Narodnaya Volya member, crafted the 1881 bombs that felled Alexander II, envisioning a future free from despotism. Executed at 27, his intellect defied empire. Sofia Lvovna Perovskaya (1853–1881), a Saint Petersburg noblewoman, orchestrated the fatal 1881 ambush on the Catherine Canal, her handkerchief signaling the tsar's doom. Hanged at 27, she embodied feminine fury against autocracy. Andrei Ivanovich Zhelyabov (1851–1881), a serf's son from Crimea, led Narodnaya Volya's 1881 assassination plot against Alexander II, his strategic brilliance shaking the throne. Executed at 29, his resolve fueled rebellion. Alexander Ilyich Ulyanov (1866–1887), a Simbirsk student, plotted in 1887 to kill Alexander III, driven by vengeance and justice. Hanged at 21 in Shlisselburg Fortress, his sacrifice sowed revolutionary seeds. Sergei Mikhailovich Kravchinsky (1851–1895), born in Kherson Governorate, stabbed General Mezentsov in 1878, avenging tsarist brutality. Exiled, he spread revolutionary ideals until his death in London at 44. These Russian titans wielded the Damoclean sword, their lives a symphony of resistance harmonizing with global anthems of liberation.

Behold the epic saga of tyrannicide—not mere musing, but the pulsating heart of emancipation. The Sword of Damocles dangles, a timeless admonition that tyranny invites its own demise. Let the philosophy of law sharpen our blades, let action ignite hearts, and let the revolution's dawn banish oppression's night. *E pur si muove!*—and yet it moves—as Galileo defied the inquisitors, so must we propel justice forward, ever vigilant, ever defiant.

Based on the provided document, the study adopts a qualitative, analytical, and theoretical research methodology that does not rely on empirical data collection but instead employs systematic textual, philosophical, and historical analysis. The core methodological approach consists of a comparative examination of major schools of legal philosophy—namely Natural Law, Utilitarianism, Marxist legal theory, the Historical School, and Sociological Jurisprudence—while deliberately excluding Positivist and Realist jurisprudence, in order to construct a robust theoretical framework for analysing the concept of tyrannicide. The research is grounded in an in-depth analysis of primary philosophical texts by thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, and Kant, alongside historical legal instruments including the French Constitution of 1793, supplemented by secondary scholarly interpretations from theorists such as Benjamin Constant, Hans Kelsen, and Roger Boesche. In addition, historical precedents ranging from ancient Greek tyrannies to twentieth-century authoritarian regimes are employed as illustrative case studies to demonstrate the practical implications, moral dilemmas, and legal consequences associated with acts of tyrannicide. Through this integrated methodological approach, the author advances a normative legal argument advocating for legislative reforms that would clearly define and conditionally permit tyrannicide, grounded in a synthesis of philosophical reasoning and historical evidence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis concludes that the right to resist a tyrant is a legitimate, philosophically grounded concept, evolving from a class-based feudal right to a democratic imperative rooted in natural law. A key finding is the deliberate omission of a "tyrant" definition in modern constitutions, which the author argues enables elite manipulation and insulates usurpers from accountability. The discussion synthesizes non-positivist legal philosophies to justify tyrannicide as a necessary, final recourse against absolute power, citing historical precedents from antiquity to the 20th century. However, the paper cautions against nihilism, advocating for life imprisonment over execution in liberal states where possible. Ultimately, it posits that the ongoing philosophical discourse on this right is essential for safeguarding democracy and human freedoms.

Philosophy of Law: Deliberations on the Right to Kill a Tyrant

Ἔστι γὰρ, ὥς φαμεν, ὁ φίλος ἕτερος ἐγώ

Philosophy of law is an academic discipline that encompasses ontological, epistemological, and axiological problems within the realm of law (such as: Figure 1). In Ukraine, an insufficient number of academic hours is allocated to the philosophy of law. In the West, the philosophy of law plays an educative and mediating role between the citizen and the state.

The term "philosophy of law" (Correlation between Philosophy and Theory of State and Law, 2021, p.2) itself was introduced into scholarly discourse by Gustav Hugo (Gustav Conrad Hugo, 1764-1844) in 1819 (Hugo, 1819). Hugo acknowledged that all tyranny is a corrupted form of monarchy.

The philosophy of law, or jurisprudence, exhibits a bifurcation into the philosophy and theory of natural human rights. Traditionally, this interdisciplinary field is concerned with reasoning, examining, and explicating "right" and "wrong" actions of an individual towards society, and of society towards the individual. The philosophy of law plays a crucial role for a thinking person, enabling them to comprehend, understand, and accept state, public, and familial laws and values. This discipline originated in Ancient Egypt during the era of the Old Kingdom (32nd-30th centuries BC) (Blerk, 2018, pp. 70-83).

The concept of a "right to kill a tyrant" within legal philosophy immediately raises a fundamental question: "Does 'killing' refer to a literal, physical act, or a metaphysical—that is, political—one?"

Metaphysical killing of a tyrant is a frequent phenomenon. It manifests in the emergence of various "liberation unions," "committees of public safety," or "groups for land and liberty," which proclaim the invalidity of the presumption of the tyrant's right to life. However, metaphysical assassination typically fails to yield positive results as long as the tyrant remains at the helm of state governance, a fact corroborated by numerous historical precedents.

Historical Precedents of Tyranny in Antiquity

1. Cypselus of Corinth (7th-6th century BC) and his son Periander, from the Bacchiad dynasty, established a tyranny in their native city. The father died a natural death, but the more selfish, cruel, and lawless Periander, along with his five sons, died violent deaths. The Bacchiads ceased to rule in Corinth.
2. Orphagoras of Corinth (mid-7th century BC) established a tyranny and died naturally, but his sons, incited by political opponents, killed one another.
3. Cleisthenes of Sicyon, a descendant of Orphagoras, died a natural death. His son, Aeschines, was killed by the demos under an oligarchic regime.
4. Theagenes of Megara came to power by proposing to the masses to slaughter all the noble and wealthy. He was soon exiled by the people but died a natural death.
5. Procles of Epidaurus was overthrown, imprisoned, and left to rot alive.
6. Pantaléon and his son Damaphon from Pisa subjugated their city but were both overthrown and executed in an armed uprising.
7. Antileon of Chalcis came to power with the support of oligarchs and died a natural death. He was succeeded by Phoxus, who was overthrown by the mob and executed.
8. Cylon of Athens was overthrown and stoned to death. He was succeeded by the lawgiver Solon, who established strict orders and reformed the laws of his grandfather, Draco.

Pisistratus seized power through an elaborate deception: he cut his own clothes, soaked them in pig's blood, and appeared in the Assembly Hall, tearfully pleading with the people for protection—a personal guard. Upon receiving soldiers, he used them to seize power. He died a natural death, passing power to his sons, Hippias and Hipparchus, who were stabbed during a festival by Harmodius and Aristogeiton (Berve, 1997).

Prominent examples of legal violations and the establishment of tyranny in Rome are the actions of Sulla and Caesar. Lucius Cornelius Sulla established a dictatorship to bring peace and order, a rule analogous to the Greek model of tyranny. He died from poisoning. He was succeeded by his son-in-law, Gaius Julius Caesar, who was assassinated by senators led by Gaius Cassius Longinus and Marcus Junius Brutus.

The voluntary abdication of a tyrant is a rare occurrence. As the ancient Greek historian Xenophon (5th-4th century BC) described in his work *Hiero*, tyrants are lonely and malevolent, and thus constantly anticipate being subjected to the same violence they have inflicted upon others. Xenophon

concluded that the birth of a tyrant is a symptom of a diseased state-legal (polis) system (Strauss, 2006, pp. 39-63).

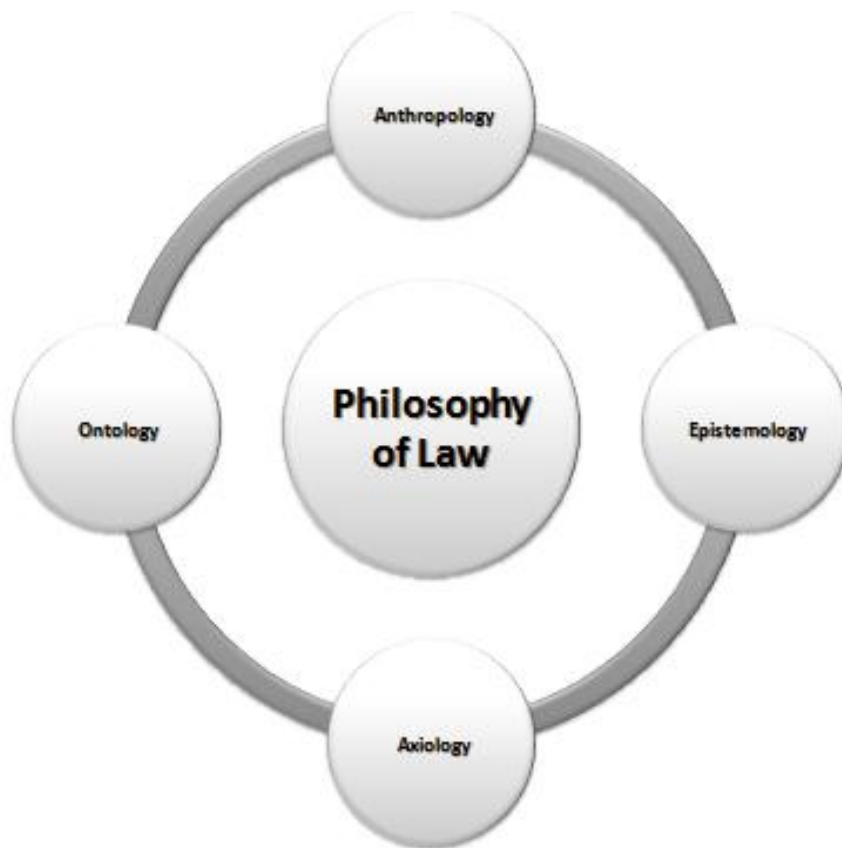


Figure 1. Philosophy of Law

Types of Legal Philosophy

The philosophy of law is not a monolithic discipline; it comprises several distinct schools of thought, each with its own methodology, fundamental principles, and historical context.

"Which branch of legal philosophy does the author rely on?" (natural law, positivist, utilitarian, Marxist, historical, sociological, realist).

Natural law (*ius naturale*) is considered inherent to humans from birth, recognizing a person as a person. Previously, before the Renaissance (15th century), natural law was inextricably linked with divine intervention and divine bestowal. The "founding father of natural law" is widely regarded as the Dutch international jurist Hugo Grotius (Hugo Grotius, 1583–1645), who, in his treatise *On the Law of War and Peace* (1625), proved (*etsi Deus non daretur* – as if God did not exist) that people are dependent not on supernatural entities (Apollonov, 2018, pp.63-67), such as God, as demanded by the Church and its theologians—particularly in the person of Thomas Aquinas (Tommaso d'Aquino, 1225–1274) with his legal worldview on Eternal, Natural, Human and Divine law—but on the state (Swartz, 2010, pp. 145-157). Grotius borrowed his theory of natural law from the ancient Roman jurist Marcus Tullius Cicero (2nd-1st century BC) (Idraaqie, 1993).

Positive law (*ius positum*), or legal positivism, is law established by the official institutions of the state. It deals with analytical jurisprudence, normative jurisprudence, and critical legal theory. Positive law was developed by Thomas Aquinas, who argued that every people and every state must correctly integrate divine law (*lex autem a Deo posita est*) into their own legal system (*lex humana*). Positive law is most extensively considered within the English legal sphere. It was developed in Britain by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and later by John Austin (1790–1859). A

follower of this school, the Anglo-Jewish jurist Herbert Hart (Herbert Lionel Adolphus Hart, 1907-1992), claimed that the foundations of positive law were laid by Aristotle (4th century BC) (Hart, 2017, p. 37).

Utilitarian law (*utilitas*) is a British invention in the philosophy of law from the 18th-19th centuries (Act and Rule Utilitarianism, 2014). Its ideological inspiration was David Hume (1711-1776), who borrowed the deontology (the theory of duty) of the ancient Greek thinker Epicurus (4th-3rd century BC). It is worth noting that the original proponent of utilitarianism was Aristotle, as observed by the Italian Averroist Alighieri Dante (1265-1321): "Vidi il Maestro di color che sanno. Seder tra filosofica famiglia" (Inferno, Canto IV; "I saw the Master of those who know, seated amid the philosophic family").

The "founding father of utilitarianism" is Jeremy Bentham with his work *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789). The three principles of utilitarianism are:

1. Pleasure or happiness is the only thing that has intrinsic value.
2. Actions are right if they promote happiness, and wrong if they produce the reverse of happiness.
3. Everyone's happiness counts equally (Plamenatz, 2022).

The utilitarian school of legal philosophy was developed by English jurists, thinkers, and sociologists: the codifier of Bentham's works, John Bowring (1792-1872), with his work *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* (1843); John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) in his works *On Liberty* (1859) and *Utilitarianism* (1861); and Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900) in his treatises *The Methods of Ethics* (1874) and *The Principles of Political Economy* (1883).

An interesting critique of this school was presented by the French liberal politician Benjamin Constant (1767-1830) in his work *Principles of Politics Applicable to All Representative Governments* (1815). Constant argued that law is a principle, whereas utility is merely a result (such as: Figure 2). The *archē* (first principle) is the cause, then comes law, and utility is the effect. To desire to subordinate law to utility (utilitarianism) is like subordinating the eternal laws of arithmetic to everyday interests, to be an opportunist (Welch, 2012, pp. 134-151). Constant was a notorious "political rat" with his "eternal principle" of anti-Rousseauism: "[Jean-Jacques] Rousseau misunderstood this truth [the legitimacy of the state], and his error made his social contract, so often invoked in favor of liberty, the most terrible auxiliary of all kinds of despotism" (Rousseau a méconnu cette vérité, et son erreur a fait de son contrat social, si souvent invoqué en faveur de la liberté, le plus terrible auxiliaire de tous les genres de despotisme) (Constant, 1861, p. 10).

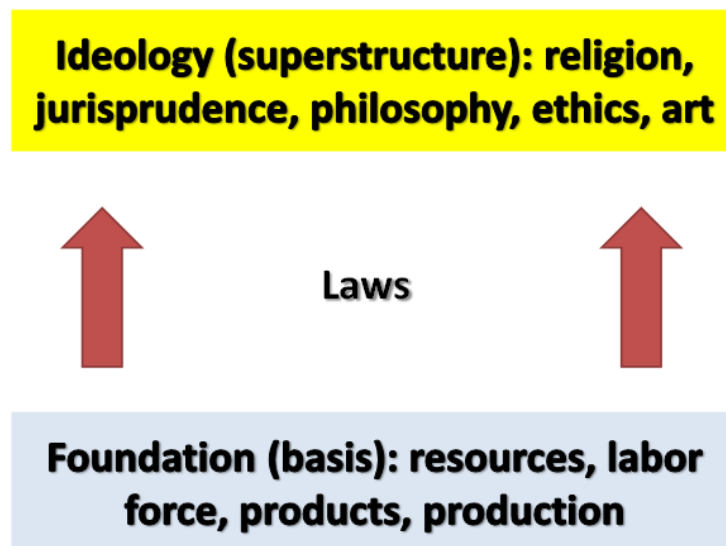


Figure 2. Base and Superstructure (Marxist Theory)

Marxist Law – founded in the late 19th century by the jurist Karl Marx (Karl Heinrich Marx, 1818-1883) and the philosopher, the first Marxist, Friedrich Engels (Friedrich Engels, 1820-1895). Marxist law characterized the philosophy of law as follows:

1. Any law is a regularity of the political, a foundation of jurisprudence, and a historical inevitability.
2. Laws are closely connected to the state; laws are a manifestation of the autonomy of the political.

3. All laws create an illusion of freedom; laws are a demonstration of the economic freedom of some and the enslavement of others.
4. State law (legislation) consists of potential correlations to people's life activities, adapted for the suppression and subordination of individuals through the law and a moratorium on the use of force. Laws are a specific monopoly on interactions between people and a means of restraining people from encroaching on the state.
5. Laws are an expression of the violence of the ruling class(es) over other classes.
6. Laws are the formation and designation of an ideology that illustrates and provides legitimacy for the embedded values of the dominant class(es) (Hunt, 2017, 355-366).

Historical School of Law – this school posits that law is created in accordance with the historical experience and the unique spirit (Volksgeist) of a particular people. Before a law is adopted, it must not be alien to the people for whom it is made. All law is an affirmation of traditions, superstitions, and customs; therefore, historical law is the history of the past, reflecting its interests. The founder of the historical school of law is Charles Montesquieu (1689-1755) with his book *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748). The development of historical law was continued by Gustav Hugo (who, along with the entire new historical school, was criticized by Karl Marx in his manuscript *The Philosophical Manifesto of the Historical School of Law*, 1842). The authority of the school was established by the German jurist Friedrich Carl von Savigny (1779-1861) in his work *The Vocation of Our Age for Legislation and Jurisprudence* (*Vom Beruf unserer Zeit für Gesetzgebung und Rechtswissenschaft*, 1814). Savigny believed that German society was in a nascent state and public opinion was not yet formed, therefore, the manifestation of the popular spirit (Volksgeist) was absent. This school was finally consolidated by the German jurists Karl Friedrich Eichhorn (1781-1854) with his book *German State and Legal History* (*Deutsche Staats- und Rechtsgeschichte*, 1801) and Georg Friedrich Puchta (1798-1846) in his two-volume work *Customary Law* (*Gewohnheitsrecht*, Volume I - 1828 and Volume II - 1837).

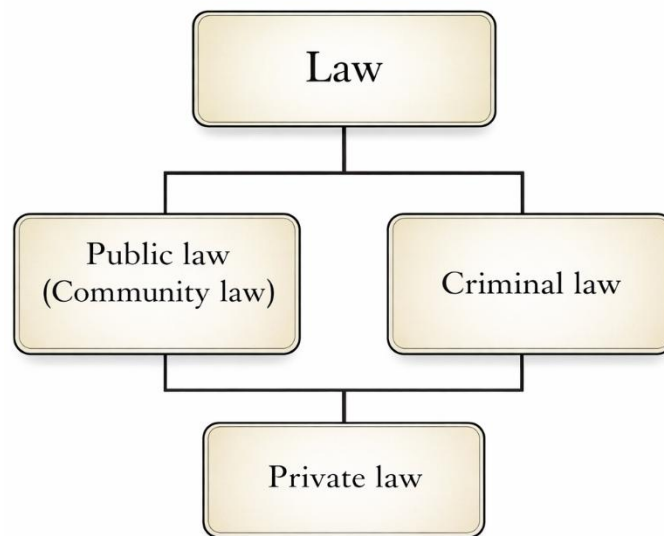


Figure 3. Classification of Law

Sociological Jurisprudence – focuses on the relationship between society and legal logic. The "founding father" of this school is the German jurist Rudolf von Jhering (1818-1892) with his famous work "The Struggle for Law" (*Der Kampf ums Recht*, 1872) (Jhering, 1874). The core principle is that all of life is a struggle for one's rights—a struggle waged by the people, the legislator, every social class, and every one of us (*Das Leben des Rechts ist ein Kampf – ein Kampf der Völker, der Staatsmacht, der Klassen und Individuen*) (Estermann, 2012, p. 63). Rudolf von Jhering developed this semi-positivist and semi-phalansterian direction (using the Fourierist concept of a phalanstère) jointly with his compatriot Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Gerber (1823–1891). Gerber is known for his contribution to private

law, expounded in the two-volume work *System des Deutschen Privatrechts* (Volume I - 1848 and Volume II - 1849). Jhering and Gerber sought to identify the most optimal path for creating a Romano-Germanic legal system (such as: Figure 3).

The followers who expanded the conceptual scope of this school were the English sociologist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), the French jurist Léon Duguit (1859–1928), the Austrian legal scholar Eugen Ehrlich (1862–1922), and the American sociologist Roscoe Pound (1870–1964).

Realist Jurisprudence, or Contextual Law, is a concept that interprets all laws as deriving from necessary social interests and government policy. This school of thought considers not only abstract rules but also public interests and social order.

This legal theory originated in the United States in the 1920s-1930s (Fuller, 1934, pp. 429-462). "Wild realist jurisprudence" is associated with the American Judge Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. (1841-1935) and his work *The Common Law* (1881). Holmes's principle posits the necessity of being prepared for what the courts will actually do. The development of the realist school was continued by the American jurist Karl N. Llewellyn (1893-1962) in his introductory course for students, *The Bramble Bush: On Our Law and Its Study* (1930). The "founding father" of American legal realism is the political scientist and jurist Hans Morgenthau (1904-1980) with his work *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (1948). Its central principle is that the lawmaker is less important than the law enforcer.

This research will utilize all legal theories within the philosophy of law, with the exception of positivist and realist jurisprudence.

Defining "Tyrant" And "Tyranny". The Legitimacy of Eliminating Tyranny and the Tyrant

"Why are political institutions called into question, and subsequently, human life itself? On what grounds can one propose to deprive another person of their life?"

Have tyrants truly become extinct? Why is there no definition of a "tyrant" in the Constitution of Ukraine (Ukraine, 2021)? In the Spanish Constitution (*La Constitución Española*, 1978)? In the German Constitution (Constitution of the German Republic, 1949)? In the French Constitution (Constitution of the French Republic, 1958)? In the Italian Constitution (Constitution of the Italian Republic, 1947)? In the Dutch Constitution (The Constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2018)? In the American Constitution (Constitution of the United States of America, 1789).? And in the British Constitution, it is only mentioned in passing (Constitution of the United Kingdom, 1991), with an imprecise formulation that delegates the right to overthrow tyrants exclusively to the aristocratic land oligarchy, which possesses such a "sacred" right derived from the Bill of Rights of 1689 (English Bill of Rights, 1689)?

Bourgeois-capitalist countries have "gotten rid of" this definition because it hinders the political leadership of these countries from deceiving, enriching themselves, and promoting their own people into power, as they fear for the lives of their protégés. The definitions: "tyranny," "tyrant," "despot" have been erased from the legal field. This is an outrageous legal arbitrariness! It is necessary to draft and enact a law that explains and permits the liquidation of tyranny, protecting the state from the encroachment of ambitious individuals.

How does the philosophy of law regard the "tyrant" and "tyranny"? What constitutes the concept of a "tyrant"? How to resist a tyrant? Is it the sacred right of every citizen to kill a tyrant (for example, the "ideal" French Constitution of June 24, 1793, states that yes. Preamble. Articles 11, 14, and 120) (Constitution of the French Republic, 1958), when "the sword of justice severs the head of the tyrant" (Marat, 1793)?

Tyrants will never become extinct, but it is possible to avoid a "tyran-casus" (a case of a tyrant's emergence). Political mechanisms for restraining the ambitious and power-hungry have been developed by jurists since the 6th-4th centuries BC—so believed the French Jesuit monk Georges Gobat (1600-1679). However, he believed that one should adhere to the Aristotelian-Augustinian-Thomistic principle—this is the "treatment of sin" (a violation of the 10 Commandments) (Gobat, 1681, pp. 27, 41, 63, 87, 157, 404). To starve, cauterize, drown, rack, etc., and by other, diverse, anti-diabolical methods, expel the carrion and brimstone from the "sick man" (the tyrant).

A "tyrant" is a person who has concentrated all political power in their hands and possesses absolute authority in making state decisions. They stand above the laws of their own country. "Tyranny" is the consequence of the arbitrary rule of an established dictatorship.

The word "tyrant" is of ancient Asian origin (Hittite-Lyidian, 14th-10th centuries BC). The peoples of Asia Minor called a "tyrant" one of the gods exterminated by the Romans—the god of slaves, Men (Μῆν, Mēn, possibly a goddess, not a god). Men patronized the Hittites in private sacred rites, who asked him for indulgence and for the slaves' patience towards their masters. The word "μῆν" itself means "wrathful," "malicious," "awakening," "small," "secluded," and "rising" (like the Sun) (Bailly, 1935, p. 1278). The last major king who sought indulgence and made offerings to Men was Mithridates VI Eupator (2nd-1st century BC), so that his wives and lovers would not poison or stab him (Fischer, 2017, pp. 88-91).

Menē was a free and aggressive man. He subjugated his tribesmen, ceasing to exile the undesirable and beginning to exterminate them (and they became his followers, slaves, δούλος, bound, dependent, subservient). The ancient peoples of Asia Minor (Lydians, Carians, Isaurians, Philistines, Trojans, Lycians, Pamphylians, Cilicians, Lycaonians, Cappadocians, Hattians, and Hittites) used the epithet "tyrant" for the god Men, which meant "The All-Cruel Ruler."

The first to use the word "tyrant" in ancient Greece, after the fall of Troy, was Homer. The concept of "τύραννος" (tyrannos) was conceptualized and explained in Hellas during the Classical era (6th-4th centuries BC).

The philosopher Plato offers a completely satirical critique of tyranny, especially in *The Republic*, Book VIII. He defined a tyrant as "<...> anyone who strives to rule over all the people of the state, thereby strives for tyrannical power over them <...>" (Plato, 1990, p. 117).

Plato's definition goes beyond mere political structure. For him, a tyrant is not just a ruler with absolute power, but one whose soul is dominated by irrational, lawless desires (epithumia). The tyrant's internal state of being—a slave to his own worst impulses—is what manifests externally as the brutal oppression of the state. The political tyranny is a direct reflection of the psychological tyranny within the ruler's soul. Describing Plato's critique as "satirical" is apt. He portrays the tyrant as utterly miserable, paranoid, and unfulfilled, surrounded by enemies and incapable of true friendship or trust. The power he wields is thus revealed as hollow and self-destructive. This philosophical condemnation provides a powerful intellectual basis for later justifications of resistance, framing tyranny not just as a political crime, but as a fundamental perversion of the natural order and human good.

The first European scientist, Aristotle, asserted:

"The correct forms of government are <...> monarchy, aristocracy, and polity; the deviant forms are tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy" (Aristotle, 1983, p. 42).

"Therefore, we permit not a man to rule, but the word [of law] (logos), because a man [allocates more goods and fewer evils to himself] and becomes a tyrant. However, the ruler is the guardian of justice, and if of justice, then also of equality in fairness" (Aristotle, 1983, p. 159).

Aristotle's classification is based on a single, powerful criterion: whether the government rules for the common good ("correct" forms) or for the private interest of the rulers ("deviant" or "corrupt" forms). Aristotle provides both a definition of tyranny (corrupt, self-interested one-man rule) and its primary antidote (the rule of law). His philosophy argues that to avoid a "tyran-casus," a state must be structured so that the impersonal "word of law" is sovereign, thereby preventing any individual from accumulating the power to rule for their private benefit.

Plato and Aristotle called for the violent and physical destruction of tyrants.

Plato's five forms of government (πέντε πολιτεῖαι, *The Republic*, Book VIII):

1. Aristocracy.
2. Timocracy.
3. Oligarchy.
4. Democracy.
5. Tyranny.

Tyranny is a consequence of democracy, democracy a consequence of oligarchy, oligarchy a consequence of timocracy (junta), and timocracy a consequence of aristocracy.

The tyrant is the decadence of political systems. The tyrant combines all three parts of the soul; he is, as it were, the "Supreme" being, after numerous metempsychoses (μετεμψύχωσις). All three constituent parts of the soul are active in the tyrant, but they work to detrimental effect. The parts of the soul are:

1. Logical (λογιστικόν, the reasoning), originating from the head;
2. Thymos (θυμοειδές, the spirited), responsible for the heart and the purity of the soul (the thirst for recognition);
3. Erotic (ἐπιθυμητικόν, the appetitive), obsessive, located in the abdominal region, fulfilling its own or others' desires.

All people progress from the erotic to the logical soul. When the soul has reached the highest sphere (the logical), it becomes a philosophical soul.

The political theories of Plato and Aristotle were synthesized by the ancient Greek historian Polybius (3rd-2nd century BC).

Polybius of Megalopolis, born in the Achaean League, the son of a strategos, received a worthy education for his time. He was sent as an ambassador to the Roman Republic, where he remained as a tutor for the children of the general Aemilius Paullus Macedonicus, the conqueror of Northern Greece. Polybius read many natural-philosophical and philosophical works to the Roman children and, to facilitate the comprehension of the Roman youth, wrote his Universal History, in which he expounded his famous "political cycles" (κύκλος). Through his work, the historian revealed the political strategy of both Plato and Aristotle.

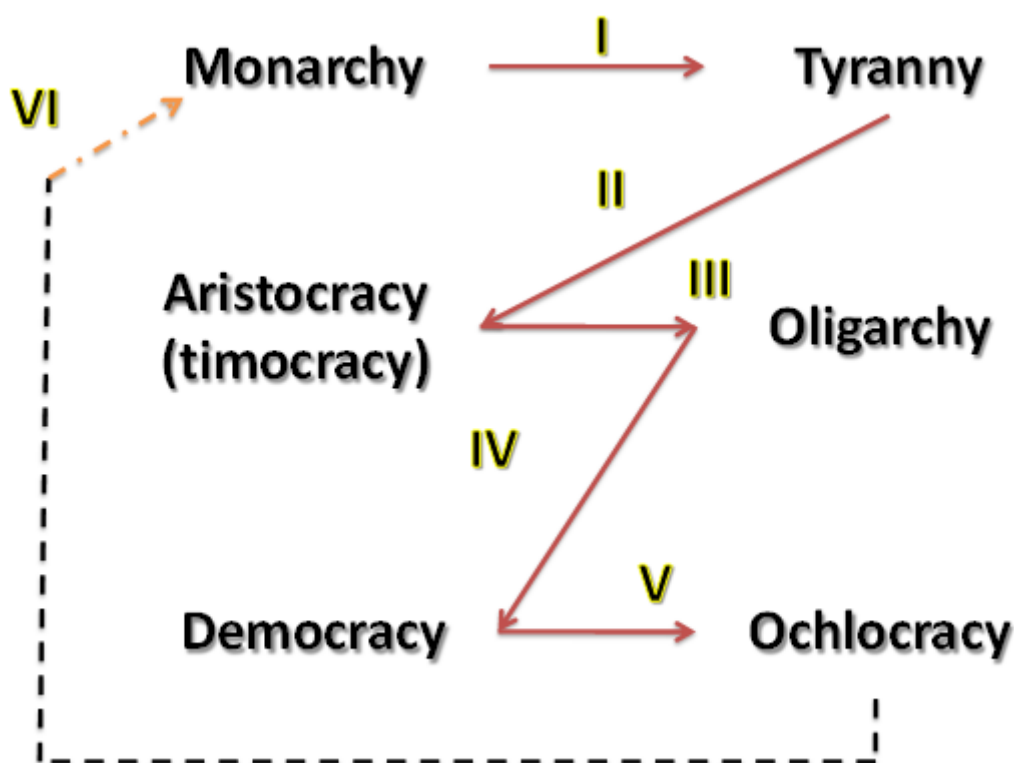


Figure 4. Cycle of Political Regimes and Their Degenerations (Classical Theory)

In his Histories (Book VI. 2-11, 43-57), Polybius noted that the entire history of humanity consists of three basic forms of government:

1. Democracy;
2. Aristocracy;
3. Monarchy (Polybius, 2010, pp. 371-413).

However, these three types degenerate or become corrupt, which is exacerbated by people's voluntary renunciation of their rights for the sake of an agreement to accept one another as legal subjects. The degenerate forms are as follows:

1. Ochlocracy (mob rule);
2. Oligarchy;
3. Tyranny (despotism).

No matter what one calls power, it is always based on these 6 political principles (or seven — democracy-aristocracy-leader-monarchy-ochlocracy-oligarchy-tyranny). They are eternal, cyclical, and inescapable. If Plato and Aristotle derived their theories based on the premise that a charismatic leader, a chieftain-monarch, stood at the beginning, followed by aristocracy, etc., then Polybius argued that the foundation was a social contract, democracy, or, one might say, primitive communism (such as Figure 4).

Charisma (χάρισμα) — denotes being marked by grace or favor. The word "charisma" in Ancient Greek meant to attract, lure, attach, captivate, enchant. Charisma has, on one hand, a genetic factor, and on the other, an acquired, learned one. It is a deliberate intellectual, actor's performance. For the ancient Greeks, charisma was associated with the Charites. These are three sister goddesses (Aglaia - beauty, splendor, messenger; Euphrosyne - joy, sweet-faced; and Thalia - abundance, bloom, festivity). The Charites corresponded to the three Roman Graces (Beauty, Harmony, Prosperity).

Charismatic leaders are a challenge of their era, its "breakdowns," whether social or psychological. Initially, the word "charisma" belonged exclusively to the religious sphere, but now it is widely used in sociology and psychology.

A scientific definition of "charisma," a highly contested one, was provided by the German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) in his book *The Sociology of Religion* (1920):

"Charisma is a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are not accessible to the ordinary person..." (Weber, 1965, p. 22).

Weber also understood this as a manifestation of a psychological impasse—an unconscious sense of grandeur before another (people, by their very nature, tend to seek a master), the frustration of one individual and the proof of another individual's frustrations. The instinct for submission is formed at an early human stage within the family (Weber, 1921, pp. 1-76).

The Polybian model served as an excellent foundation for the creation of European political formulas, both for the ancient Roman jurist Marcus Tullius Cicero (1st century BC) in creating *De Republica* and for the Florentine legal scholar Niccolò Machiavelli (15th-16th century) in writing *Il Principe*. Following Machiavelli, his compatriot, the Italian anthropologist Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), improved upon the Ciceronian model in his book *Scienza Nuova* (1725). The development of the most ancient political system was examined in greater detail by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who declared this in his works *Perpetual Peace* (1795), *Rechtslehre* (The Doctrine of Right, 1797), and *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797). In them, he demanded the separation of power from legal might, from the letter of the law (*Rechtsstaat*).

Plato-Aristotle-Polybius-Cicero-Machiavelli-Vico-Kant—all of them made a significant contribution to explaining, outlining a clear and distinct understanding of the political perspective for the philosophy of law. All other thinkers are either mere followers (*filialis*) of their ideas or referents of the ideas of this septet.

The Bible provides a definition of tyranny—an act, or a state model, of rough, cruel, unjust control or treatment of other people.

In the Old Testament, written in ancient Hebrew, the word "tyrant" did not exist. The term "tyrant" appeared in the New Testament, originally written in Koine Greek. The Old Testament term עֹשֶׁק (oshek) is close in meaning to the word "tyrant." The word "עֹשֶׁק" is derived from "עָשָׂק" (ashak), which means: "to displace," "to oppress," "to squeeze out," "to supplant," "wrath" (a manifestation of the malevolent nature of humanity), "to cut off," "to crush," "to wrong," "murderer," "rapist," "explosion," "decay," "a manifestation of weakness," "adulterer," "noisy," "clumsy," "quarrelsome," "restless," "hot-tempered," "thief," and "robber" (Raboker, 2019).

In the Old Testament, the term oshek is used as follows (Book of Proverbs, Chapter 28):

- "16. A ruler who lacks understanding is a great oppressor, but he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days.
- 17. A man burdened with bloodshed will flee into a pit; let no one help him.
- 18. Whoever walks blamelessly will be saved, but he who is perverse in his ways will fall at once.
- 19. He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty.
- 20. A faithful man will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished.

21. To show partiality is not good— yet a person will do wrong for a piece of bread.
22. The stingy are eager to get rich and are unaware that poverty awaits them.
23. Whoever rebukes a person will in the end gain favor rather than one who has a flattering tongue.
24. Whoever robs their father or mother and says, "It's not wrong," is partner to one who destroys.
25. The greedy stir up conflict, but those who trust in the Lord will prosper.
26. Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe".

In the New Testament, the words "tyrant" and "tyranny" are used as follows (Apostle Paul, "To the Romans," Chapter 13):

- "1. Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.
2. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.
3. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right, and you will be commended.
4. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.
5. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.
6. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.
7. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.
8. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.
9. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."
10. Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law".

Notable mentions in the Bible of oshek, ashak, tyrant, and tyranny include:

I. 2 Chronicles: "Then all the assembly made a covenant with the king in the house of God. And Jehoiada said to them, "Behold, the king's son shall reign, as the Lord has spoken concerning the sons of David." (23:3).

II. The Prophecies of Isaiah: "In righteousness you shall be established; you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you." (54:14).

III. The Prophecies of Isaiah: "Instead of bronze I will bring gold, and instead of iron I will bring silver; instead of wood, bronze, and instead of stones, iron. I will make your overseers peace and your taskmasters righteousness." (60:17).

IV. The Gospel of Luke (Chapter 4):

"18. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,

19. to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

V. The Book of Acts: "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." (10:38).

In Islam (the Quran), the Greek concept of a tyrant is used, not the Judaic one:

I. "But when he was about to strike the one who was an enemy to both of them, he said, "O Moses, do you intend to kill me as you killed a man yesterday? You only wish to be a tyrant in the land, and do not wish to be of those who amends." (Surah Al-Qasas, 28:19).

II. "Indeed, Qarun was from the people of Moses, but he oppressed them. And We gave him of

treasures whose keys would burden a band of strong men. Thereupon his people said to him, "Do not exult; indeed, Allah does not like the exultant." (Surah Al-Qasas, 28:76).

III. "And those who, when tyranny strikes them, they defend themselves." (Surah Ash-Shura, 42:39).

Power, cloaked in the veil of corruption, begets tyranny. The British politician John Acton (John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton, 1st Baron Acton, 1834-1902) wrote in a letter dated April 5, 1887, to his acquaintance, the Anglican bishop and historian Mandell Creighton (1843-1901):

"Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority; still more when you superadd the tendency of the certainty of corruption by authority" (Stross, 2018, p. 7).

The modern consideration of the terms "tyrant" and "tyranny" was undertaken by the jurists of the City of London when they needed to rid themselves of a "usurping mustachioed man." On January 30, 1649, in London, the "traitor to the motherland," King Charles I of the House of Stuart, was executed. This date can be considered the beginning of a new perspective on the rulers of a country—a free perspective, even if the decision of the Long Parliament was not based on legal equality but merely on the nobility's defense of their rights and freedoms guaranteed to them in the Magna Carta (a 13th-century document). With the beheading of the English king, was it a regicide or a tyrannicide? The proponents of the Stuart Restoration claimed it was a regicide, while the English people believed it was a tyrannicide.

The English thinker John Locke (1632-1704) described how to resist a tyrant to avoid anarchy (Two Treatises of Government, 1689).

The right to rebellion is an inalienable right of the people, but one must first utilize official channels. It is necessary to gather an evidence base of the criminality of a specific individual and present it to the competent authorities (accusing him of breaking the laws). In the event of being ignored by the unjust force, one may respond with unlawful force. The number of individuals targeted must be limited so that the innocent do not suffer. One must go to the end and not compromise with lawlessness, yet not seek to replace one lawlessness with another. It is necessary to restore the legal framework, not to abandon it (§. 203-210) (Locke, 1988, pp. 378-384).

The execution of the French King Louis XVI on January 21, 1793, was an act of breaking with the Christian world and a return to the Greco-Roman perception of rulers.

Modern Tyrants: Executions in the 20th–21st Centuries

Over the past century (1925–2025), the iron grip of tyranny—marked by repression, corruption, and mass suffering—has provoked the ultimate retribution: execution.

Benito Amilcare Andrea Mussolini (1883–1945), Italy's fascist Il Duce, seized power in 1922, launching wars in Ethiopia and Albania and enabling the Holocaust's atrocities, with over 400,000 deaths tied to his regime. Captured by partisans near Lake Como on April 27, 1945, he and mistress Clara Petacci were shot in Mezzegra the next day. Their corpses, hung upside down in Milan's Piazzale Loreto, became a global symbol of antifascist triumph, though the extrajudicial killing stoked debate over vengeance versus justice.

Ion Antonescu (1882–1946), Romania's Conducător, ruled from 1940, aligning with the Axis and overseeing the genocide of 280,000 Jews in Bessarabia and Bukovina, plus 150,000 deported to death camps. Post-WWII, the People's Tribunals convicted him of war crimes on May 17, 1946. Executed by firing squad in Jilava Prison with two ministers, his death marked Romania's shift from fascism to Soviet influence, a judicial act rooted in retribution for Holocaust complicity.

Augusto José Ramón Pinochet Ugarte (1915–2006), Chile's dictator from 1973, led a CIA-backed coup, unleashing a reign of terror with 3,000 killed, 38,000 tortured, and 200,000 exiled. His regime's "Caravan of Death" massacred dissidents, cementing his infamy. Arrested in London in 1998 for crimes against humanity, he faced house arrest but was extradited to Chile. Though he died of a heart attack in 2006 before formal execution, his prosecution set a precedent for international justice, with Spain and Britain pursuing charges for his atrocities.

Nicolae Ceaușescu (1918–1989), Romania's communist "Genius of the Carpathians," ruled from 1965, enforcing policies like forced abortions and village demolitions, linked to 2 million deaths from poverty and repression. During the 1989 Revolution, he and wife Elena were captured in Târgoviște. A

swift military tribunal convicted them of genocide and economic sabotage; both were shot on December 25, 1989. The televised “Christmas Execution” dismantled the Securitate’s grip, galvanizing Romania’s democratic turn.

Saddam Hussein al-Tikriti (1937–2006), Iraq’s Ba’athist “Lion of Babylon,” seized power in 1979, waging wars against Iran (1 million dead) and Kuwait, plus the Anfal genocide (50,000–182,000 Kurds gassed). Captured by U.S. forces in 2003, he faced the Iraqi High Tribunal for the 1982 Dujail massacre. Convicted of crimes against humanity, Saddam was hanged on December 30, 2006, in Baghdad.

These executions—reveal tyranny’s Achilles’ heel: power invites retribution. From partisan bullets to televised noises, they affirm that absolute power invites absolute retribution, echoing ancient calls for resistance. The Damoclean sword, ever-suspended, warns that absolute rule courts absolute judgment.

CONCLUSION

Tyrannicide historically emerged within class-based and pre-modern societies where political power was justified through divine bestowal and inherited status, rendering equality and universal human rights impossible. In such contexts, rebellion against a ruler was deemed unlawful because it was construed as rebellion against divine will, unless successful, in which case the deposed ruler was retrospectively judged as having lost divine favor. Medieval political theology, particularly through Thomas Aquinas, began to introduce a conditional justification for resistance by asserting that the people could rise against rulers who threatened the Church, thereby embedding tyrannicide into Western political thought between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. From antiquity through early modernity, tyrannicide was understood as a public act aimed at restoring justice, with the perpetrator required to accept public judgment to demonstrate moral intent.

From the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries onward, especially in post-revolutionary France, the concept of tyranny expanded beyond monarchs to include any ruler exercising power unlawfully and suppressing fundamental rights. The emergence of the social contract and constitutionalism replaced divine legitimacy with natural human rights, dissolving the sacral status of rulers and lifting the moral taboo against killing those who wield power unjustly. Thinkers such as Gustav Radbruch further argued that obedience to tyrannical law is itself criminal, emphasizing that justice and human rights stand above positive law. However, modern discourse has blurred the meaning of “tyrant,” conflating it with dictators, despots, and satraps, thereby removing tyrannicide from serious public debate and reducing it to a conceptual taboo rather than a legal–philosophical problem.

Contemporary legal philosophy affirms the inviolability of human life and tends to favor life imprisonment over execution, yet the complete rejection of tyrannicide risks either legitimizing absolute power or extinguishing political agency. To deny any right to resist or eliminate a usurper is to regress toward feudal or class-based orders, while uncritical acceptance of killing risks chaos and nihilism. As noted by scholars such as Roger Boesche and Hans Kelsen, justice remains a fragile, relative, and democratic ideal rooted in tolerance, critical reasoning, and public discourse. Following the Socratic tradition and modern political philosophy, the right to discuss—and, in extreme circumstances, to resist tyranny, even through force—remains essential to the preservation of freedom, dignity, and the political will of free individuals throughout human history.

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