



**Episode 1,412: The Democracy Delusion**

**Guest: Michael Malice**

**WOODS:** We're at Hump Day of Michael Malice Week, and today we're – [laughing] I don't know what that means, but –

**MALICE:** Yes, you do.

**WOODS:** We're going to talk today about democracy, because that's kind of a third-rail topic. It's just a topic that, you know, people feel like you can't talk about because everybody just assumes it's glorious and great, and there's no alternative, and it has good outcomes, and it's the best system except for all the others, and all that. But there's a really, really good critical discussion of democracy, both in Michael's own voice and in the analysis of other people who figure into this book, *The New Right*. So I have taken some notes, and we're going to dive into those, if I can click on – son of a – there it is. There are my notes.

All right, you talk about one of your favorite people, or at least one of your favorite books, *The Machiavellians* by James Burnham in this chapter, so we're going to get to that. But I want to start with a thought of your own, and then we'll talk about Jonathan Haidt and some others and see how this all fits.

**MALICE:** Sure.

**WOODS:** You say, "Democracy should be regarded not as an ideal, but as a bait and switch used by the left to foster their own elite." Now, that runs contrary to what everybody thinks, because they think, well, how could there be elites with democracy? Everybody has the right to vote, and you can choose anybody alike, and so the result is necessarily a reflection of the popular will. And you're suggesting that the reality is a little less sunshiny than that. So what is really going on in democracy?

**MALICE:** *The Machiavellians* is this really important book. It's out of print. It's hard to find, although I think it's been PDFed, and you can find it easier. It's hard to find a physical copy. I think was like \$200 when I was writing the book. And I got mine a very long time ago. Mencius Moldbug, who was in many ways like the founding father of neoreaction in certain circumstances, he and I independently both recommended that as the most important book on politics for everyone, so that was really kind of cool to see.

The premise of that book is that democracy is not how it's presented. And the book discusses for authors: Pareto, Robert Michels – they may be correct the pronunciation when I was doing the audiobook – Gaetano Mosca, and Georges – wait, I said Sorel, right? Sorel, Mosca, Pareto,

and there's a fourth one that I'm completely blanking on. I guess you and I both have Alzheimer's. The points of these theorists is that they all have this idea of the elite and how the elite forms. And the simplest way to understand it is: Hillary Clinton will always have more in common with George W. Bush than she will with the janitor who has voted Democrat all his life. And how the circulation works is — it's not like if you overthrow the elite — one of the stupidest jokes on Twitter — I hate this, when I ask people who are like libertarians or anarchists, like who's your favorite president? They're like, "Oh, William Henry Harrison."

**WOODS:** Yeah, ha ha, yeah.

**MALICE:** It's like, it's not like the presidency died. They did not skip a beat between him and his replacement. Wasn't it, whoever, wasn't it James Garfield? Or Tyler. No, "Tippecanoe and Tyler too." Tyler.

**WOODS:** Yeah, it was Tyler.

**MALICE:** So it's like, that's the whole point. If you get rid of one elite, another one will automatically take its place because human beings are hierarchical. And the elites, which claim to act in the name of the people, will always be far more dictatorial and oppressive than the alternative.

**WOODS:** So this is what — then also in the chapter, when you talk about —

**MALICE:** Yeah, Michels, Pareto, Mosca, and Sorel. Okay, that's four of them, yeah.

**WOODS:** Okay. Well, then you supplement this with a discussion taken right out of the work of Jonathan Haidt, whom I've had on and we both agree is a very interesting guy, about the way people come to conclusions about things, the way people come to their opinions about things. Because it runs contrary to the democracy myth, which is that, well, people will dispassionately assess the evidence and come up with an objective answer without bias. But what's the truth of the matter?

**MALICE:** Well, I use an example to demonstrate how even people who are both rational, who have the same data, might come to opposite guides for action. And here's an example I use. Let's suppose you have a right-winger and a left-winger trapped in a tower. The myth of Icarus, right? And they go, okay, we've got wax, we've got feathers, we've got to work together for some reason or whatever for this thought experiment. Let's make these feathers, and let's fly out of here.

And the right-winger or the conservative would say, "Wait, hold on a minute. Last time Daedalus and Icarus tried this, Icarus died." And then the leftist will say, "Yeah, we know to avoid the mistakes of the past, so we won't die. Let's make these wings and fly out of here." And the conservative would say, "They knew what the threats were, and they were prepared for them, in one sense. They knew what to worry about. And they still died. So if we do it, we're going to die." So even with access to the same information, the same physical stuff in front of you, and the same myth, people might reasonably have completely differing points of action and guides to action. So this does go against the democratic principle, which is: I give you my point of view, you give me your point of view — and of course, there's always two points of view, only — and then you sit down and you think about it, and you're like, you know

what? This person sounds more reasonable. And then you go that way. Rationality and politics, the interrelationship with them, is very overrated and not accurate in real life.

And here's another example that people can never seem to wrap their head around. It's a certain type of midwit, which is: voting is not transitive. So for example, in math, one is better than two, two is better than three; therefore, one is better than three. It's a syllogism. That's not how people vote. They might say, I prefer candidate A to candidate B; I prefer candidate B to candidate C, but they might still prefer a candidate C to candidate A. And a lot of people can't understand that. They think of it in terms of math. And this is not a theory of mine; this has been demonstrated repeatedly, how some Bernie voters will prefer Trump to Hillary. It's an easy example. So all these things about democracy being this kind of simple thing, it never works out that way in practice.

**WOODS:** I'm looking at page 125 of your book, and you say, "Those who need leaders are not qualified to choose them." That's a good one. Do you want to expound on that?

**MALICE:** Well, that is one of my pithy quotes. So part of me does not want to expound on it, because I'm so proud of it. And if any of you jerks out there use that quote, you better give me credit. Or if you want to be clever about it, give Dave Smith credit, because that will trigger me [laughing].

But in all seriousness, this is what I regard as the central problem of democracy, which is people who are unable, whether it's from — we could even be nice about it. They've got their family. They've got their job. They've got enough on their plate. They are not in a position to make this choice. And often the choice in front of them is a false choice. And yet they're being made to decide on behalf of everybody else. This is I think the central issue behind the democratic system, that you're asking people, half of whom are below average intelligence, to make a decision that will require a fairly high amount of intelligence. Like I wouldn't know how to necessarily pick a good lawyer between two. It's a technical question. And here we're asking for someone who's good on economics and fiscal policy and foreign relations. These are very, very complex issues.

**WOODS:** No doubt, but then what people will come back with is: okay, it's good for us to know the weaknesses of democracy. It's better to know than not to know. But at the same time, given that anarchism is not considered to be a viable option by almost anyone, they'd say: in a way, though, what am I supposed to do with this information? Because there's no better system. Nobody wants to live under a dictatorship. So what are you seriously proposing here? Are you just being a contrarian for no reason?

**MALICE:** It was really funny, because I was on Glenn Beck's show yesterday, and Glenn's like, "You're an anarchist, right? You just want people rioting in the streets." And I said, "Actually, Glenn, people riot because those streets are run by the government, and if you had them private, you wouldn't have people getting rid of things like that." So it was a very funny moment where he was kind of a little bit taken aback, because that was a perfect example of the validity and superiority of an anarchist system.

No, I was on Joe Rogan, and he said, "You don't believe in voting? What's your alternative?" And I said, "Freedom." And the idea that I have to — and the thing with democracy is if you set somebody down, right, and — and the difference between radical thought and conservative thought, conservatives — and this is not a criticism of conservatives, because

this approach often is a valid one. Broadly speaking, conservatives take that which is given and try to find ways to improve it. And given that we have it pretty good, and that our ancestors weren't dummies, and a lot of them were really smart, really good people, it is, if you're going to choose, choose to do what they did. Because life's been increasing, wealth's been increasing. If you were blind and had to pick, do things as they were or start from scratch. It's really hard to reinvent the wheel, right? Radicals will just look at things and say like, what if we start completely over? And this is an approach conservatives don't psychologically cotton to.

The point being, if you sat someone down and had the idea of government and say, "I've got this idea for how to run a country, but really, everyone has to be involved pretty much for my idea to work," it's like, yeah, cool story, bro. Not interested. Yet, that is really the basis of democracy. Like, well, for this system to work, we need as many people to be involved as possible. That's not a selling point. That's a failing point. It's much better when you have a system where as few people are needed to run it as possible, because, A) people introduce error, and B) it's going to be much cheaper.

**WOODS:** I want to transition into something related here, because one of the other things that we're told about democracy – I mean, remember, *The Washington Post* has now as its a slogan, "Democracy dies in darkness." So what we're being told is that –

**MALICE:** If only.

**WOODS:** [laughing] Yeah, exactly.

**MALICE:** Turn out the lights, baby.

**WOODS:** [laughing]

**MALICE:** All of a sudden, I want to be a candle maker. Break all those lightbulbs.

**WOODS:** Yeah, yeah. But the idea here is that, well, don't worry. We will inform people with an unbiased media that will present them with the information they need to make intelligent decisions. So democracy, it's just one myth after another surrounding it, and the New Right obviously has had rather a rocky relationship with the media, so this might be an opportune moment to say something about that. The Mike Cernovich chapter is actually very apt when it comes to this subject.

**MALICE:** Well, here's the other thing. If democracy is about picking the best person for the job, regardless of what you think of these two individual men, if the same system tells you that Barack Obama and Donald Trump are the best men for the same job, no matter what your criterion is pretty much, something is wrong with how that program's being run, because the outputs are completely, almost completely different.

**WOODS:** Yeah, no kidding. And that's been true for years and years and years. I mean, I remember the year that I just finally said I can't even do this anymore – and I had been a political junkie – was when they presented me Bob Dole and Bill Clinton. I just thought, nope. I just can't even watch the debates. I cannot take part in this. But yet, there's got to be something wrong when it generates that kind of result.

**MALICE:** And there's also something fascinating, which is love of democracy. We have a very public system that takes place over a year, primaries and caucuses, designed to eliminate choices. That is literally the point of these systems, is to make people have fewer choices for who they can vote for for presidency. And so if you're going to say democracy has to be about a binary choice, well, why am I being forced to effectively have two choices, where in every other aspect of my life, I have more choices than I can count. Ten deodorants, you know? Like how Bernie Sanders – or how many channels? I'm on a shaving soap kick. I've got a hundred samples at my house, you know what I mean? And no one sits down often and questions, because it's just presented in government schools as this is the greatest thing since sliced bread. Well, I disagree. I think there have been a lot of great things since sliced bread. And sliced bread ain't that hot.

**WOODS:** Right. But if we were sitting down to make a thorough critique of democracy, we'd do all the arguments from the public choice school, where they say, when you compare the kind of knowledge you want to acquire when you go out to make a major purchase as opposed to vote for somebody, well, the thing is, when you make that purchase, you immediately are going to have to deal with the consequences of that. If it's a terrible TV that you shouldn't have bought, you lost the money and you have to deal with it. Whereas if I vote for somebody, well, maybe or maybe not I'll feel the consequences of that, and maybe the person will or won't do what he says he's going to do. There's not an immediate feedback, so there's not the incentive to be informed in the first place. But also, when we think about, with democracy it's majority wins – 51%, you win; the 49% lose – but in the marketplace, even if I have really unusual musical tastes, which I do, it doesn't matter that most people disagree with me, because I can still get what I want. So in every way, democracy, so-called, political democracy is inferior. So I've done some material on that, and there are some reasonable books on our side on that. But to what extent are the folks in the New Right really critiquing democracy? Aren't they critiquing too many immigrants are coming in and they're going to vote for the wrong people?

**MALICE:** Well, that is a critique of democracy. Here's the point. So let's suppose voter turnout is, one year, 40% of registered voters, next year it's 60%. Why is it better to have 60% voting than 40% voting? Either it's legitimate or not. So the idea that, well, if 60% vote, they get to speak for the 40, and the 40% who vote get to speak for the 60 who didn't, like, not voting, why do you get to speak for me, and at what point do you – you know, if it's just 10% of the population that votes, 90% of the people have to accept the outcome? Why? So it's very weird in that regard.

Now, what you're talking about with the New Right and the immigrants, that is very true, and their critique of democracy is such that they know democracy isn't about representing the common good, a phrase which has no real meaning, but about forcing outcomes and getting your guys to the polls so you win. It's all about winning. And an example of this would be, if you sat down with these Democratic activists and said: okay, what if all of these illegal aliens were living in the shadows, live in fear, as you claim, and so on and so forth, and you claim correctly – what if we made them all legal residents, but they and their kids can never vote? It would be like the mother of all meltdowns. So at a certain level, there's an understanding that everyone has to be able to have a right to vote, especially, though, your people. And you have to make sure you get your people to the polls. So it's about much more the manufacture of a majority than actually reflecting the general will.

**WOODS:** Right, right. Now, I want to pack as much in as I can here, so in this episode, I do want to at least take a brief moment to say something about the media. And maybe, to get into your book, I did mention Mike Cernovich' of his name, because he's an interesting guy about how he's coped with media attacks on him. And he says these people are trying to undermine my credibility, so I've basically tried to create a new metric of credibility, namely my audience size. You know, I just built something on my own, and it works. And I'm basically – he didn't put it quite this way, but he's a force to be reckoned with, just on the strength of his own persistence and determination. I mean, it's an interesting story.

**MALICE:** Oh, yeah. He's really a very smart guy. I was very glad you had him on the show. He was on Rubin last week. And he is one of the big people who knows it's about: what are their tools, how do they use their tools to further their agenda, and how to defang them? So we get into that with him at length in the book. And again, it's not about marginal tax cuts or the estate tax or gerrymandering. It's about how does the media manipulate and deceive in order to get over – And Tom, what you and I understand and I want to make clear to people: this isn't some dopey Republican-Democrat, conservative-liberal thing. This is war. This is being manipulated into soldiers coming home in coffins, and people overseas being slaughtered by the hundreds of thousands. And for what? And that is why this is so important and so dangerous, the techniques that they use.

**WOODS:** On the media question, obviously, Trump got a lot of flak for calling the media the enemy of the people.

**MALICE:** Yes.

**WOODS:** It's a phrase that you have not hesitated to employ when referring to the media, but it's the kind of phrase, though, that it really, really reveals divides. For example, it's not a phrase Mitt Romney would use. It's a phrase Mitt Romney would condemn. Well, that's no surprise. I know who Mitt Romney is. It's obviously not a phrase that most of the Democrats would use at this point. But what's interesting is, it's also a phrase that even in the libertarian world, the respectables, they wouldn't be caught dead echoing the idea that the media, who at their best are just simply looking to innocently inform the American people – I can think of think-tank presidents who would die a thousand deaths before describing the media as the enemy of the people, even though the media is systematically misleading people on everything that's supposed to matter to these think-tank presidents. So I don't quite get that.

But that, I think, is one of the things that really, for all their skepticism and lack of certainty about Trump and where he's going, the fact that he has these enemies, it's one of these things – it's like Nixon. Nixon I think was not as charismatic as Trump. But the fact that he had the enemies that he had was one of the things that made people rally to him. And the fact that he identified them and hit back, I think that's one of Trump's huge strengths. Even if he can't necessarily point to a victory in every cause these people want, they view him as being on the right side of this.

**MALICE:** Yeah, there was this great moment during the campaign when he has this rally, and he was asked about Putin. He's like, oh, you know, they talk about Putin, and he goes, what did he do that's so bad? And they go, "He kills journalists." And Trump's like, "Oh, my God, that actually is terrible." He goes, "I would never do that." And he goes, "Eh, let's see...no, no, no, I would never do it. I mean, they're terrible people, but I would never – eh...no, no, no, I wouldn't do it."

**WOODS:** [laughing] Oh my gosh, I forgot that.

**MALICE:** And he points to them back, and these people are horrible. And to be fair, if you have someone running for president, pointing to you and joking about killing –

**WOODS:** [laughing] Yeah, I know, that would be –

**MALICE:** – in the context of someone who actually does it, I can see how you'd be like, this is not okay.

**WOODS:** Yeah.

**MALICE:** That's fair from their perspective.

**WOODS:** Absolutely, yes.

**MALICE:** But the point that there are so many times when they will openly and brazenly reconfigure a story to make sure that the target and the enemy remains the same – I forgot who it was on Twitter, and I apologize, but there was a shooting in New Zealand, and they made that about the far right, understandably, given his manifesto. And then you had that shooting in – where was that, India, the next week?

**WOODS:** Oh, was it Sri Lanka?

**MALICE:** Sri Lanka, excuse me, sorry. That's my Western provincialism. And the framing was the same, "How the Far Right, blah, blah, blah." So no matter what – when you have it, in that sense, that no matter what the subject is, whether it is far-right terrorism or it's Islamic terrorism, the far right – and by "far right," they mean Mitch McConnell – is the enemy, then you know these people are not operating decently and honestly. And the other thing is – again, where I break with conservatives – conservatives think, oh, the media back in the day used to be honest and now they're partisan. And I go, we're taught in school, even, about yellow journalism and the Spanish American War and the torpedoes and all this other stuff from like over a hundred years ago. At what point what – what, during FDR, when there are lap dogs sitting at his feet, begging after every word? At what point do you think that these journalists types weren't advocates for the elite, the intellectuals, meaning themselves, running America, despite everyone's wishes to the contrary?

**WOODS:** It's like what Bryan Caplan says about the universities. The universities ain't what they used to be and never were.

**MALICE:** Yes, and I talk about that, of course, at length in the book.

**WOODS:** Yeah, so there's so much rich material in here, and it's such a great tour of so many interesting people and ideas and just controversial topics, all under one little roof here, *The New Right: A Journey to the Fringe of American Politics*, linked on all the show notes pages for this entire week. [TomWoods.com/1412](http://TomWoods.com/1412) is this one. Now we've got some really hot stuff still to come. I mean, yes, we've talked about democracy, the media is the enemy of the people. We had some stuff about it, let's say, irreverent humor the other day. But that's scratching the surface, because there's a lot more to be digging up, and we will be digging.

**MALICE:** Yeah, I wanted this book to be as dense as possible in terms of content, though as fun as possible in terms of readability.

**WOODS:** That is exactly the balance that you're striking here.

**MALICE:** Good.

**WOODS:** Because usually it's one or the other. It's dense and you want to jump out a window, or all it is is breeziness and fluff, and there's no point in reading it.

**MALICE:** Right. So to strike that balance, first of all, it's a great accomplishment for you, and it's a nice experience for the reader. All right, so go pick up your copy of *The New Right* over on Amazon; we'll link to it at [TomWoods.com/1412](http://TomWoods.com/1412), and we'll see you tomorrow.