

## Robespierre, Terror, Democracy and Ethics

Ethics:

Duty based ethics:

Utilitarian ethics:

Robespierre “On the Moral and Political Principles of Domestic Policy”, 1794

Now, what is the fundamental principle of the democratic or popular government—that is, the essential spring which makes it move? It is virtue; I am speaking of the public virtue which effected so many prodigies in Greece and Rome and which ought to produce much more surprising ones in republican France; of that virtue which is nothing other than the love of country and of its laws. . . .

What do you think Robespierre means by “public virtue?”

<p>If the spring of popular government in time of peace is virtue, the springs of popular government in revolution are at once <i>virtue and terror</i>: virtue, without which terror is fatal; terror, without which virtue is powerless. Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible; it is therefore an emanation of virtue; it is not so much a special principle as it is a consequence of the general principle of democracy applied to our country's most urgent needs.</p>	<p>The word spring here refers to the spring in a watch - what makes the watch move. Why do you think Robespierre calls public virtue the "spring of popular government in time of peace?"</p> <p>How does Robespierre justify terror?</p>
<p>It has been said that terror is the principle of despotic government. Does your government therefore resemble despotism? Yes, as the sword that gleams in the hands of the heroes of liberty resembles that with which the henchmen of tyranny are armed. Let the despot govern by terror his brutalized subjects; he is right, as a despot. Subdue by terror the enemies of liberty, and you will be right, as founders of the Republic. The government of the revolution is liberty's despotism against tyranny. Is force made only to protect crime? And is the thunderbolt not destined to strike the heads of the proud?</p>	<p>How does Robespierre justify a republican government using terror?</p>

Does Robespierre follow duty based or utilitarian ethics? Explain.

Do you agree with Robespierre's position on ethics? Explain why or why not