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Abstract

This essay argues the universal relevance of the Western constitutional experience. It does so, however, not with reference to the commonalities of historical circumstance or the experience of specific states. Instead, we argue that, just as events in the natural world must follow universal laws, the same is true about stable democracy, whether we are concerned with parliamentary or presidential systems, economically developed or undeveloped states. We take as given that there necessarily exist universal principles of democratic constitutional design, even if those principles remain largely undiscovered. We argue, further, that discovery is more likely if we conceptualize constitutions as equilibrium selection devices, and if we take as our starting point whatever understanding we possess about coordination and equilibrium selection in complex social processes, including the evolution and character of social norms and conventions.