

which good things we would like to succeed them. But we can't entirely do without a vision of what life would be like at its best.

#### 14. Freedom and paternalism

The flexibility of the term 'freedom' undoubtedly plays a huge role in the rhetoric of political demands, particularly when the language of rights mingles with the language of freedom. 'We have a right to freedom from . . .' is not only a good way, but the best way to start a moral or political demand.

Freedom is a dangerous word, just because it is an inspirational one. The politics appropriate for societies of free individuals are above all democratic. The enemy here would be any elitism, or paternalism, supposing that some particular kinds of people, through superior reason or knowledge or wisdom, are best fitted to govern the rest, since they know peoples' interests (their *real* interests) better than the people themselves do. The elitist doctrine is that the freedom of the ignorant and those with no self-control is just frightening and useless *licence*. The most celebrated account of the elitist image is due to Plato's *Republic*. In the argument of that book, government should be in the hands of disinterested and selfless rulers or guardians who have been rigorously educated into wisdom. The mob has no right of self-determination. It is there to be governed; it is not to be allowed to find its own way of life or make its own mistakes (Grosz seems to agree; see Fig. 11 opposite).

We might disapprove of Plato and approve of the democratic upshot. But we may want to be a bit nervous of the sustaining myth associated with it. The modern emphasis on freedom is problematically associated with a particular self-image. This is the 'autonomous' or self-governing and self-driven individual. This individual has the right to make his or her own decisions. Interference or restraint is lack of respect, and everyone has a right to respect. For this individual, the ultimate irrationality would be to alienate his freedom, for instance by joining a monastery that



11. George Grosz, 'Waving the Flag'. Grosz comments on the ideal illustrated by Delacroix (Fig. 10).