

Legitimacy in Greek Society and Plato and Aristotle's Forms of Government

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Limitations in the Principle of Liberty and Misconceptions about the Humanist Trend

The current opinion about the prevalence of democracy in all aspects of ancient Greek life is highly questionable: in the first place, it was confined to Athens and, secondly, it was a limited and flawed type of democracy that was rejected by the philosophers Plato (428-347 BC) and Aristotle (384-323 BC).

Nor was the concept of legitimacy in Greek society necessarily based on the principle of voting in elections. Other criteria included wealth, in accordance with the oligarchic

principle, and power as in a democracy or a tyranny. A third criterion was the concept of inherited rank giving aristocratic legitimacy. All these forms of government were experienced by Greek cities in successive stages.

Similarly, with regard to the contention that religious doctrine was replaced by a humanist trend in Greek society, this was plainly not the case at either a political or existential level.

In spite of our rejection of these two prevailing views, we do not by any means deny that a democratic system with freedom of speech based on humanistic principles was present in Athens at the time, and we contend that, although limited in nature and scope, Athenian democracy, despite its shortcomings, was better than any other contemporary system of government. At the same time it is important not to exaggerate the merits of

Athenian democracy or overstate its political and intellectual benefits.

However, we should point out that by claiming a religious dimension in Greek society, we are not insisting on the existence of the temporal representation of religious power in the form of temples and a priesthood analogous to the established church in medieval Europe. Rather, we are referring to the religious spirit of the Olympian mysteries, the participation of priests in important decision making (as can be seen in the events of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*), and the consultation of fortune-tellers by leaders in times of war. Priests also sought approval of the gods for the political actions of rulers, and great events of state involving the government or the army were invariably accompanied by religious ceremonies and rites, as were trials and meetings of the legislative assembly. Nor should we forget the many sentences of imprisonment, exile and execution issued

against philosophers and politicians on the grounds of apostasy.

The examples of Anaxagoras (500-428 BC) and Aspasia well illustrate the limitations of humanistic and liberal principles and the effect of an intolerant religious climate. Anaxagoras was compelled to flee and Aspasia was accused of disrespect to the gods. This cultured woman was exposed to the vilest and the most shameful insults as a result of her critical spirit and liberal opinions, and she was not helped by Pericles' impassioned defiance.

The Athenian general and statesman Alcibiades suffered from the accusation that his companions had maltreated a statue of Hermes, the god of fertility, as a result of which their male members, ears and noses were cut off. Alcibiades and his companions were also accused of ridiculing the Illyrian rites, following which the Athenian assembly voted to confiscate all Alcibiades' possessions

and wealth, and condemned him to death. However, he managed to take refuge in Sparta.

Nor were the Sophists protected by humanitarian ideals, as can be seen by the imprisonment of Protagoras (481-411 BC), the renowned Sophist philosopher, who coined the famous dictum 'Man is the measure of all things; he decides what shall be and what shall not be.'¹

The list goes on; Aristides was starved, Themistocles and Miltiades were banished, and Anaxamoras was expelled. Even Socrates (469-399 BC) and the great philosopher Aristotle did not escape the charge of apostasy. Socrates was condemned to death by the Athenian assembly on charges of introducing strange gods. When Aristotle was condemned for religious disbelief on the basis of quotations from his works, the silence was palpable. He was forced to flee from Athens in his declining years and was sentenced to death

in absentia. He died from an illness brought on by the suffering he experienced in exile.

The accusation of apostasy was generally followed by a sentence of imprisonment, banishment or death, which clearly demonstrates the limitation of the concept of freedom of expression in classical Greek society. Members of the assembly, in accordance with the law of privation laid down by Cleisthenes, were able to sentence anyone who they considered to be a danger to the state to banishment for a period of ten years, a threat which enjoined caution on the politically ambitious. Some reports indicate that even Cleisthenes himself was sentenced to exile.

As has been already stated, our contention is that while democracy undoubtedly existed in ancient Greece, it was imperfect and limited in scope, and the same can be said for the humanist trend, which was less influential than religious presence. While it is inaccurate to

suggest that the temporal symbols of religion were non-existent in Greek society, the view that religion played no part in daily life is equally invalid. Nor does this cancel out humanism, which co-existed with religion, although in an inferior role.

In ancient Greek culture gods were represented in human form and humans were considered to have a divine essence. However, in spite of a certain amount of political freedom, Greek consciousness lacked the element of free spirit since fate and necessity were held to rule over all things, including the gods,² although there was blind faith in the eternal laws of gods. Greek games and ceremonies were a conscious expression of the happy unity between the human and divine.

In Greek religion, the spirit was superior to nature since real power lay in policy not in nature. This can be seen in the belief that Zeus, the supreme power and king of gods,

triumphed over all the powers on earth and in the heavens. The spirit becomes reconciled with nature in Greek art where the gods are depicted in a sensory form with human bodies and thoughts. Meaning becomes reconciled with form, the spiritual with the sensory, and the inner spirit becomes perfectly expressed in its external manifestation.³

So, where is the humanism in all this? And where is the democratic legitimacy in Greek cities outside Athens? Even Athens could not tolerate the opinions of Anaxagoras, Socrates and Plato.

The Athenians could not begin to imagine the modern concept of democracy — multi-faith, multi-cultural, regardless of race or gender orientation — or the true meaning of freedom of expression, especially religious expression.

The Growth of Democratic Legitimacy, its Flowering and Decline

The core meaning of democracy is a system in which the community is the source of power, or rule by the people for the people. The community elects its representatives (deputies) in fair and free elections and the government is composed of ministers overseen by deputies. The deputies have the power to pass legislation, raise revenue from taxes and determine how such revenue should be spent. They also have the power to call ministers to account for their behaviour and determine whether they should continue as ministers or not, and in general run the affairs of the state in a satisfactory manner. In short, the underlying principle of democracy is rule by the people in the interests of the people.

Democracy comes from the Greek word *demokratia* – *demos* 'the people' + *kratia* 'power'.

In order to define the nature and scope of democracy we should go back to the 7th century BC when Athens was a prominent Greek city subjected to a despotic form of aristocratic rule. The legitimacy of this regime derived from wealth and privilege, power being exercised by a class of prodigiously wealthy aristocrats who operated a usurious economic system under which families who failed to pay their debts forfeited their freedom and were sold as slaves.

In this society, in which the rich and poor were separated by a wide gulf, legislation was enacted for the benefit of the wealthy. However, the people began to call out for legislative reform. The aristocrats bowed to their demand and empowered Dracon to publish new laws in 621 BC. These laws were judged especially harsh towards the poor and he was succeeded by another aristocrat, Solon the reformer, who was highly critical of the

aristocrats and rejected their methods of government, based on extortion, trickery and greed, as well as the principle of hereditary rule.

Solon came to power in 594 BC and carried out a number of political and economic reforms, the most celebrated of which was the division of Athenian citizens into four classes based on wealth, with a corresponding division of political rights and responsibilities. He also gave citizens the right to elect their ruler. His most prominent reform was the abolition of debt slavery and the liberation of those who had been enslaved as a result of failure to pay their debts. Nevertheless, Solon's system was still biased in favour of the wealthy, who retained more influence than any other class.

Solon's system was certainly not full Athenian democracy but it was an important step along the road. However, even this limited amount of democracy was too much

for some citizens, who urged Solon to take over absolute power himself. He refused to do so and continued with his reforms until relinquishing power and ultimately leaving Athens.

The era of Solon was followed by the rule of the tyrant Peisistratus who brought prosperity to Athens for a period of twenty years. He was succeeded by Cleisthenes who, although an aristocrat, was not despotic like those who came after him. If anything, he inclined towards the people and it was during his rule that the foundations were laid for Athenian democracy, so often lauded in the West. In 508 BC he divided Athens into electoral units on the basis of geography rather than hereditary wealth. Each unit was represented by a group chosen by ballot every year in the assembly of five hundred. Only male citizens over the age of eighteen years old were entitled to meet in the public forum to propose laws and to vote on them. Then a smaller group was chosen by ballot to enact the legislation that had been

agreed upon. An unlimited number of jurors were also chosen by ballot.

This type of democracy is known as direct democracy and has the following features:

1. Exercise of the right to discuss public civil affairs — including political — in a public forum or public assembly

2. Equality of free citizens before the law

3. Power to assume responsibilities of jurors

However, Athenian democracy, with its attendant rights and obligations, did not extend to all people; excluded from the democratic process were women, slaves and minors — those under eighteen years old. There was no role for women in administration or politics since they, together with slaves, did not have

citizens' 'rights' in the modern generally accepted sense.⁴ Hence, participation in the democratic process was not the prerogative of all citizens but only of those who were male, over eighteen years old and descended from the original inhabitants of the city state.

On this basis we can say that Greek democracy was limited and deficient in that it did not treat all citizens equally. Full citizenship for all was not achieved until the modern era, after the liberal tradition had reached its apogee in the 20th century. In spite of this, the germ of the Western idea of citizenship lies in the Greek concept of the same name. Greek democracy strongly resembles its modern-day counterpart, especially regarding its affirmation of the right to equality of members of a group and its emphasis on the right of political participation.⁵ Greek citizenship, for all its shortcomings, remains the lineal and etymological progenitor of the Western term 'citizen'.⁶

According to Western sources, the birth of democracy in Athens occurred towards the end of the 6th century, in 508 BC. It was logical that this should be so since it was in Athens that certain social groups enjoyed the benefits of citizenship, which gave them the right to participate in framing and enacting legislation and in the political and legal processes of the state.

In his *History of the Peloponnesian Wars*, Thucydides mentions that Athens was governed by a democratic constitution based on majority rule, in accordance with which the law was applied. That Athens was in a special position is made clear in Pericles' funeral oration to the soldiers who died in the Peloponnesian War, where he refers to the Athenian constitution as being without parallel in any other city, a democratic system not found elsewhere in which the rulers are elected on the basis of competence rather than

hereditary privilege in a society characterised by free speech, inventiveness and openness.

We need not take this speech too literally since, after all, it is a political speech given by the city's ruler, but there is no doubt that the Athenian system of government — however bad the shortcomings pointed out by Plato and Aristotle — was qualitatively better than any other contemporary system of government.

What is also sure is that Plato and Aristotle's opinions about democracy were among the factors that led to its subsequent decline and ultimate demise. Prominent among these factors were the failure to confront attacks of aggressors, internal instability, increase in class struggles, the ascendancy of demagoguery in the popular assembly, and the levying of harsh taxes and duties. In this way Greek democracy was responsible for its own demise, although it did not breathe its last until after the Macedonian occupation. The lesson

to be drawn is that democracy without wise and mature participants is a worthless exercise.

Not only did democracy die out in this part of the world but even the term 'democracy' itself began to lose its original meaning and took on the negative connotations of 'demagoguery' attributed to it by Plato and Aristotle in the disparaging references of medieval and Islamic scholars up until the dawn of the modern era.

Although Greek democracy was defective and limited in extension, and subject to long periods of exploitation by ignorant demagogues, there is no doubt that the Athenian model — for all its limitations — was considerably better than the Roman rule in the Hellenic Age, as well as being superior to most forms of government in medieval Europe and even preferable to some political systems today.

Athenian democracy had a legitimacy found in no preceding or subsequent regimes until the dawn of the modern era. For example in the Roman era, the state had a defective view of the citizen who was defined without reference to identity and illimitability.⁷ Human alienation reached its peak in Roman politics and religion, not because of the utilitarian relationship between the gods and men but because the emperor arrogated himself power over all humans as divine authority, such that he ruled over the fate of citizens in a more despotic and arbitrary fashion than the gods.

The emperor was glorified as the supreme power and venerated as a god since he was the irrational arbiter of all men's fates. Garoudy repeatedly comes back to this point:

In the Roman empire, all power was stripped from the individual and vested in the emperor; all divinity was concentrated in a single being, much to the distress and misery of the individual human being who was deprived of his power and his essence and even of his future.⁸

This led to

... blind trust in the eternal laws of the gods, whose statues were nothing more than lifeless corpses. Religious chants were just empty words devoid of spiritual meaning. The temples of the gods were devoid of spirituality, and games and festivals could no longer symbolise that happy unity between gods and men. The ecstasy of the certainty of the self — as expressed so boldly by the Stoics — had changed into a feeling of the loss of the divine spark as a result of the spread of 'unhappy consciousness', which led to a general collapse of morality.⁹

Hegel says, 'Unhappy consciousness was the symbol of this general loss, as a result of which the personality lost its internal value and its capacity for thought.'¹⁰

This increasing sense of alienation and misery and the contradiction between the limited and the limitless would eventually usher in the medieval era when Europe suffered for long centuries from the loss of ability to think for itself. In the Middle Ages it was the clergy and the monarchs who thought, willed and chose while the people reacted passively like sheep. The dominant discourse of the time was that of master and slave. Man had no legitimacy qua man; legitimacy derived from money, power or the priesthood, depending on local conditions. Philosophy was reduced to being the handmaiden of theology!

Plato's and Aristotle's Forms of Government

Although Plato was immersed in imaginary speculation in his description of the 'Ideal Republic', he was much more realistic when he turned his attention to analysing existing forms of government. Indeed, I often feel that his descriptions match comparable regimes throughout the ages down to the modern era. However, here we have to exclude his view of democracy, which was so closely bound up with the realities of his time that he was unable to discern any redeeming features in this form of government, let alone consider how it might be reformed or improved.

If we except Plato's imaginary Ideal Republic ruled over by a philosopher, his classification of forms of government, in order of preference, was based on real models extant at the time. His preferred model, the government of the good (or aristocracy) was the nearest to

his Ideal Republic and his least favourite was autocratic rule (tyranny). Plato's classification of forms of government was as follows:

1. **Aristocracy**

This is rule by a virtuous minority or a 'government of the good', which strives directly to promote justice and good. However, this equitable system of government, nearest in form to the Ideal Republic, is prone to changes in patterns of intermarriage or education, which lead to its dissolution and eventual extinction.

2. **Timocracy**

This system comes into being as a result of the disappearance of the aristocracy. The powerful class takes over government, seeking glory and pre-eminence by military might.¹¹ This form of government is based on greed ie. a timocracy derives its legitimacy from wealth and military power (as in the city of Sparta). A

conquering city such as this treats others on the basis that they themselves are victors and its main concern is to accumulate wealth. However, because of the unequal distribution of wealth, the system breaks down and another form of government emerges from among the wealthy class.

3. **Oligarchy**

This is a system of government dominated by the wealthy,¹² whose sole *raison d'être* is the creation of wealth. This is similar to Al-Farabi's 'City of Commercial Exchange', which is based on the principle of accumulation of wealth by the wealthy class, who alone have the right to govern or to come to power. The poor, on the other hand, have no rights in this regard even if they perform outstanding feats.¹³ Yet, this regime also begins to decay as a result of the increasing greed of the wealthy and the predominance of the system of usury. The people become progressively poorer, finally leading to mutiny and sedition.

4. **Democracy**

When the people succeed in overthrowing the corrupt wealthy class a system of majority rule comes into being, which gives the people the right to participate in government.¹⁴ Democracy is rule 'by the people for the people' and its legitimacy derives ultimately from the opinion of the majority. In essence it is similar to Al-Farabi's 'Communal City' in which all are equal and free to do whatever they want. However, this is not democracy as we know it today but merely a type of democracy that we could label direct anarchic democracy since it is based on people's desires and is a system in which office can be purchased for money. Plato's democracy is similar to Al-Farabi's and it is clear that neither of them were familiar with any other forms of democracy, such as consensual, liberal or social democracy.

Plato erred in equating democracy with rule of the mob and it is informative in the modern political era to note that he criticised the concept of democracy because, in addition to conferring on the people the right to participate in the running of the state, it also gave citizens the right to follow their desires¹⁵ and do as they pleased with their lives. Citizens could also be elected as jurors and it was through one of these bodies that Socrates (469-399 BC) was sentenced to death for apostasy and corrupting the young.¹⁶

Plato argued that democracy was indissolubly linked to the 'rule of the mob' stirred up by invective that appealed to the emotions rather than to rational thought (as would be the case in rule by a minority or the philosopher-king in the Ideal Republic).¹⁷ Indeed, Plato considered that democracy was a corrupt form of government and he ranked it low, just above tyranny on his list, which he claimed evolved as a direct result of democracy.¹⁸

Plato's view of democracy reflects a narrow elitist view, equally restricted in its way as theocratic rule.¹⁹ He was unable to appreciate the values of liberty and equality, seeing the former as the road to anarchy. He considered that people were born to their class rather than achieving rank through their own efforts. Those who were born slaves or workers were unable to aspire to another class.²⁰

It may have been that Plato's (and Aristotle's) views on democracy were indelibly marred by their experiences of its Athenian manifestation, but the fact remains that neither of them were able to perceive any merit in the system, nor could they envisage any type of revised or reformed model.

At any rate Plato considered that democracy was inherently unstable since conditions would always break down and end in anarchy

because of the freedom given to demagogues. Inevitably democracy would end up by creating its exact opposite — tyranny or autocratic rule.²¹

5. Tyranny

The tyrant is the head of the government. At first he is just and equitable but then he becomes unjust and immoral; he abandons the rule of law and refuses to listen to reason. He is a shameless embezzler and oppressor and does not hesitate to use torture to consolidate and perpetuate his rule.²²

Plato utilises another basis for classifying government, which he refers to in 'The Laws', one of his dialogues most anchored in reality. Governments can be either constitutional or unconstitutional. A constitutional state, which gains its legitimacy from the constitution, may be governed by an individual, a minority, or a group.²³

I now turn to a comparison of Plato with Al-Farabi in response to the claim that the latter drew on the former for a large part of his political philosophy. This claim was made, on the basis of evident similarities between the two philosophers while ignoring points of difference, by such writers as Butros Ghali, Abdul Rahman Badawi, Waddi Bur and Simon Blackburn, who states that 'Al-Farabi's Model City is but a version of Plato's Republic.'²⁴ The same claim is made by Ian Richard Netton, who states that 'Al-Farabi's Model City is a copy or a clone of Plato's Republic.'²⁵

This is clearly erroneous since there are many points of difference between Al-Farabi and Plato on the one hand and Aristotle on the other. Neither of the Greek philosophers was familiar with the concept of the world state since their ideal prototype was a city state. Al-Farabi's state was conceived of as a model city on a world scale where the object of

association is the happiness of its citizens. Hence, it is unjust to suggest that Al-Farabi's city is a mere copy of Plato's Republic.²⁶

Unlike Plato and the other Greek philosophers, Al-Farabi's thinking was not restricted by models of city states like Athens and Sparta. He conceived of a federation of nations united under a single sovereign. Thus his conception was on a grander scale than the Greek philosophers who were unable to see beyond the confines of their daily lives.²⁷

For Al-Farabi social groupings were complete or incomplete in form. Of the former he distinguishes three examples: the world state, the nation state and the city state. The latter (the only one of the three known to Plato) formed part of the nation state and was the smallest and lowliest of Al-Farabi's social groupings. On the other hand, the city state was considered to be the ideal for all Greek philosophers except the Stoics.

It may be noted that Al-Farabi's model city is consistent with the Qur'anic vision of a world God for a single humanity, but Badawi, in line with orientalists who trace Islamic philosophy back to Greek roots, hypothesises that Al-Farabi was influenced by the Stoics.

The Stoics believed that the cosmos is a single unity presided over by reason and their 'world state' was nothing but the external political manifestation of their ontological theory. For the Stoics existence was a single essence, a natural unity and a single state.²⁸

However, in the opinion of the writer of this paper, Al-Farabi's model city can best be explained in terms of Islamic belief in the concept of Allah, Lord of the Worlds; the idea of a world God is consistent with that of a single humanity, which logically entails the political concept of a world state. This is the

contention of Jamil Saliba, who opines that Al-Farabi could only have derived his idea from religious belief.²⁹ In contrast, the Jewish belief of a particular God for a particular people implicitly denies the idea of internationality.

Al-Farabi classifies non-model cities (in the opinion of the people of the Model City) under four headings:

1. The city of ignorance, with the following subcategories — the city of necessity, founded on the basis of assuring essential needs; the city of commercial exchange, based on wealth creation and trade; the contemptible city, whose sole aim is the pursuit of enjoyment and gratification of the senses, and sexual and sensory pleasures; the noble city, which seeks to acquire glory in order to win fame and honour; the city of military might, which deals with people on the basis that they themselves are victors over

others; and the collective city, in which people are equal and free to do as they please (a type of democracy referred to above).

2. The dissolute city, whose inhabitants embrace the theories of the people of the Model City but act like the inhabitants of the city of ignorance.

3. The mutable city, which changes from a model to a non-model city.

4. The erroneous city, whose inhabitants have lost the road to happiness and have embraced false ideas about Allah and the world and the hereafter. They have lost the chance for happiness since they follow a leader who believes that he is divinely inspired but operates through delusion, trickery and deception.³⁰

Hence, it is clear that although there are similarities between Plato and Al-Farabi, there are also considerable differences between them in the classification and bases of different forms of government.³¹

The foregoing vindication of Al-Farabi's position is not to question or belittle Plato's authority in this area but simply to demonstrate the value and originality of the former's ideas. Although Al-Farabi profited from the ideas of the Divine Sage, his work is by no means a copy of the Ideal Republic.

Turning to Aristotle we find that he divides forms of government into two categories based on the degree to which they serve public or private interests. On this basis he distinguishes virtuous governments from corrupt governments. Each subcategory is further classified quantitatively into three types of government: individual, minority group and majority. Each of the six types identified have

their constitutions — good constitutions for honest governments and bad constitutions for corrupt governments.³²

I. Individual governments

1. **Kingship:** a form of government presided over by a king who abides by

the rule of law and serves the public interest by bringing about universal

justice.³³

2. **Tyranny:** ruled over by a tyrant who does not respect the law and does not serve the public interest, but rather his own interest in accumulating wealth and sensory gratification.³⁴

II. Minority governments

1. **Aristocracy:** ruled over by a competent and virtuous elite who abides by the law and serves the public interest by bringing about universal justice.³⁵

2. **Oligarchy:** ruled over by a corrupt minority whose sole aim is to accumulate wealth and increase their influence. They do not respect the law and have no desire to serve the public interest by bringing about universal justice.³⁶

III. Majority governments

1. **Polity:** Rule by the people in which the majority work for the benefit of all. The

government abides by the rule of law and serves the public interest by bringing about universal justice. Aristotle considered Polity³⁷ to be the best form of government since it is midway between the rule of the rich and the rule of the poor and is a blend of the virtuous elite and democracy, since competent people — rather than demagogues — exercise power.³⁸ The virtuous elite (rather than the corrupt elite) exercise partial power. This form of government is expressive of the middle class who balance the interests of the rich oligarchs with the poor, traditionally represented in a democracy.

2. **Democracy:** Rule by the poor and base majority of the people.³⁹ It is a corrupt system in which people do not abide by the law or respect reason but rather follow their desires, resulting in anarchy.⁴⁰

Thus, for Aristotle legitimacy derives from a virtuous constitution, application of the law and the creation of universal justice in a system of government in which no private or class interests are served at the expense of another class. However, Aristotle did not specify the mechanisms that guarantee that the virtuous elite form the government, nor did he explain how the conditional nature of democratic power operates in a mixed system such as he proposes.

The synthesis proposed by Aristotle derived from the status quo prevailing in Greece at that time and there is no guarantee that such a system could be reproduced in other conditions. This same synthesis is currently used by some corrupt regimes to give themselves a veneer of democracy but their rule is like the stage set of a play in which characters play their assigned roles!

The problem for Plato and Aristotle was that they were unable to think outside the confines of the reality they knew, and when Plato attempted to go beyond these boundaries with the Ideal Republic, he drowned in a sea of unattainable speculation and conjecture.

From the Defects of Athenian Democracy to the Defects of Modern Democracy

It should be emphasised that democracy is a mechanism for government and distribution of power, which is far from guaranteed or definitive. Its nature varies between one society and another and between one ideology and another. The operation of democracy takes many forms according to the structure of political systems, which vary from one country to another.

It can also be asserted, *pace* Plato and Aristotle, that real democracy remains the least worst system of government and the one most likely to deliver social justice because democracy strengthens — or should strengthen — the rule of the majority. It does so by striking a balance between the interests of the rich and the poor, and by not favouring the wealthy, the politically influential or those with hereditary rank.

Besides, contrary to the claims of Plato and Aristotle, it restricts the opportunities for tyranny and does not inevitably lead to anarchy since it permits conflicting parties to resolve their differences peacefully and fosters political and social stability. Democracy is not simply mob rule (as our two philosophers assert) because it creates a separation of political and social power, guarantees human rights, upholds individual freedom and promotes the public interest without favouring one party over another. It also fosters the concept of citizenship whereby all individuals

have a say in determining the future of their country and expressing their opinions.

Democracy is meaningless unless it is total; a democratic political system does not operate in a vacuum from other sectors in society. If the democratic spirit does not pervade all walks of life – from the highest to the lowest – then democracy cannot achieve its goals. In this case we do not have real democracy but 'partial democracy'.

If Plato and Aristotle were alive today, it is likely that they would level criticisms against modern democratic regimes just as they did against Athenian democracy.

In the modern world, many so-called democracies conceal within them anti-democratic tendencies — for example, the propaganda campaigns financed by interest groups and the biased and misleading publicity

during election periods. Powerful pressure groups infiltrate into the public domain and wield an influence out of all proportion to their numbers. In the United States it is not the voter who has the last word in elections but the state electoral colleges, which can reject popularly elected candidates if they consider them 'unsuitable'. The members of these electoral colleges are generally appointed from within the ranks of the political parties in power. In Britain, the ruling political parties act to ensure that only candidates they approve of can aspire to the post of Prime Minister. In France the presidential electoral law stipulates that candidates for the presidency must be vetted by a number of the great and the good before being permitted to submit their candidacy. Elections in Western countries are by no means totally democratic. In addition, in the majority of countries elected deputies are primarily concerned with the interests of their own constituencies and devote most of their attention to the parties that financed their electoral campaigns. In many democracies, parties put the interests of themselves and their

members ahead of the public interest. In many countries the wishes and interests of those in government are paramount and bureaucracy is dictatorial in nature. Power is exercised in hegemonic fashion so as to stifle debate, and spheres of influence and wealth creation are monopolised to the detriment of the public interest. A semblance of democracy is maintained in order to delude the public but the basic aim is to serve the interests of the political and business elite.

These anti-democratic tendencies are not so much visible in the internal workings of democratic governments as in the area of their foreign policy, as evidenced in the increasingly strained relations between the West and Arab and Islamic countries (with the conspicuous exception of Israel), and between the rich and powerful countries of the north and the poor and weak countries of the south. Further, international bodies and organisations are under the domination of the powerful countries that established them and are run

with a semblance of democracy in order to serve the interests of those countries as, for example, in the exercise of the veto. Hence it is clear that the policies pursued by democratic Western powers are far from democratic, especially their foreign policies.⁴¹

So, as I have already pointed out, Plato and Aristotle would have criticised modern democratic regimes for the same reasons that they criticised the democracies of their era. Democracy is incoherent and bound to fail since it is against the public interest and merely serves the elite. It is against the law of natural selection, which ensures the survival of the fittest.

Anyone who wishes for a system of government that ensures the common good and expresses the will of the people will turn to democracy but the only route to success in this enterprise is through fully-fledged (not partial) democracy.

Plato and Aristotle's harsh criticisms of democracy in Greek society, while well warranted, do not constitute a solution to the problem. The problems of democracy can only be solved by a more comprehensive application of democracy.⁴² So it is that the countries that have implemented democratic practices to the greatest extent are the countries with the highest level of social justice, at least as far as internal policy is concerned.

The cure to the problems of democracy is the application of more democracy by implementation of human rights and the constitution, by real universal suffrage through secret ballot, by rotation and distribution of supreme power and by non-interference in the will of the people!

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