1943

The Theory of Greek Democracy Before Aristotle

Edmund P. Burke
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses

Part of the Classical Literature and Philology Commons

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License. Copyright © 1943 Edmund P. Burke
THE THEORY OF GREEK DEMOCRACY
BEFORE ARISTOTLE

BY
EDMUND P. BURKE, S.J.

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER
OF ARTS IN LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

JULY
1943
VITA

Edmund P. Burke, S.J., was born in Chicago, Illinois, on August 4, 1916.

He moved to Oak Park, Illinois, and graduated from Ascension Grammar School in 1930. The following three years, from 1930 to 1933, he attended Quigley Preparatory Seminary, Chicago, Illinois. He graduated from St. Ignatius High School in that city in 1934.

In September of that year he entered the Milford Novitiate of the Society of Jesus, attending the Arts College of Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio, from 1934 to 1938. In 1938 he transferred to West Baden College of Loyola University, where he received his degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1939. He entered the Graduate School of Loyola University in 1939.

From 1941 to 1943 the writer was engaged in teaching Classics at St. Ignatius High School in Chicago, Illinois.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION
Greek political spirit---Greek political principles.  

### CHAPTER

1. **SOLON THE FATHER OF GREEK DEMOCRACY**  
   Place---Life---Reforms---Poems.  

2. **THE HISTORIANS AND GREEK DEMOCRACY**  
   Herodotus---Thucydides.  

3. **THE OLD OLIGARCH--A CRITIC OF ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY**  
   A realist of position---An uncompromising snob---Hostile to the people, the mob---Dislike for Demos.  

4. **AN EDUCATOR AND PAMPHLETEER ON ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY**  
   Isocrates---The contemporary of Democracy---Ancestral Democracy---Excess of freedom.  

5. **PLATO--THE EVOLUTION OF A CRITIC**  
   Family position---Political philosopher---Ideal State---Death of Socrates---Enemy of Democracy.  

6. **PLATO YOUNG IDEALIST AND OLD REALIST**  
   Rigorous critic---Virtue of the second best  

## CONCLUSION

## BIBLIOGRAPHY
INTRODUCTION
GREEK DEMOCRACY

The Greeks were a practical people. Their political philosophy, too, was practical. They wanted to procure the 'good life' for their country, to be good citizens, and to tell their fellows how to become good citizens. They were interested in one another because they took an interest in the future of their country. Their 'country' we say, but the Greek talked of his Πόλις, his city-state. The Greek himself was Πολίτης, a citizen; his government was called Πολιτεία, and to live the life of a citizen was Πολιτεύειν.

Politics is a sadly cheapened word, scarcely the same word as it was when it was Πολιτική, and when a politician was a statesman, Πολιτικός. There is a simplicity about this alignment; it is as if the Greek knew what he was about. He knew what the words he used meant. Politics was statesmanship, care of the state and solicitude for its welfare. That this should be so was a thing characteristically Greek, a mark of his simplicity and practicality. The fact that all political life of the Greek, even the words he used, should be rooted in Πόλις is a most significant fact in his history. Politically, socially, economically, in culture, in spirit, in heritage, Greece was what it was, and became what it is to us, because of that singular institution, Πόλις, the city-state.

"By this (word) and its derivatives the Greek sought to express the
whole life, and the whole duty, of man; that union of human beings for a common end, which could alone produce and exercise all the best instincts and abilities of every free individual."¹

When we speak of Greece, we are often talking of Athens. Athens could not have been so great without democracy. Without the city-state there could have been no democracy. Glover sums up for us what Athenian democracy was and what it did.

It was a government of citizens met in an assembly, where, without Presidents, ministers, ambassadors or representatives, they themselves governed. They created a beautiful city and a law-abiding people; they united the Greek world or a large part of it; they defeated the Persian Empire in all its greatness and drove the Persian from the sea. They made an atmosphere where genius could grow, where it could be as happy perhaps as genius ever can, and where it flowered and bore the strange fruit that has enriched the world forever. 'Whate'er we know of beauty, half is hers.' The political temper, and the scientific,--philosophy, sculpture and poetry--Athens gave us them all in that period, a century or so at longest, while Democracy flourished.²

For the task at hand this short, eloquent eulogy must suffice. It is written by a man who has demonstrated his ability to translate the spirit of the ancient world into patterns with which the modern spirit is sympathetic. For Glover has a mind for the universal, for the unchanging. And the greatness of the Greeks is that so much of their contribution to civilization was universal, their

literature and their philosophy, their economic, social and political institutions. Yet they remained a practical people. Underneath the details in which their early political philosophy was buried lies the unchanging, the implication of broad, profound principles.

In these pages the opinions about democracy from Solon to Plato will be reviewed. We shall look for the Greek's own reflections on his own invention. And it should hardly surprise us if, in the end, we discover that all the step-children of democracy, all that her critics and panegyrists alike have censured and praised in her, were, we might say, born with her, and that the Mother of all the democracies continued to feel the pangs of her first great travail all the life long of her wonderful child. "Men keenly interested in the well-being of their race and eager to help it through its difficulties" did not keep silent. "Good citizens concerned for the future of their country" created a political philosophy almost without their knowing it, because they felt it their duty "to keep watch on the maladies of the age and to try to heal them."

Newman remarks that "the Republic formed a turning-point in the history of Greek political philosophy, and gave it a direction
which it was slow to lose. The political philosopher was to be no mere apathetic analyst of social phenomena, but the watchful physician of the State, unflinching in his diagnosis of its maladies and outspoken in pointing to the true remedy.⁶ The Republic was also the characteristic exemplar of one period in the development of Greek political inquiry. Greek theorizers on government belong by a natural division to two schools: They are Plato and his predecessors, and Aristotle. "The Politics of Aristotle is virtually the closing word, or almost the closing word, of a debate begun by Pythagoras and the Sophists, and continued by Socrates, Xenophon, Isocrates, and Plato. Aristotle's political views were the outcome of more than a century and a half of controversy."⁷ At present we shall direct our attention to the first of these periods in the formative stage of Greek political science. We shall dig for discussions of democracy amid poetic inspiration, historical detail, the fine colorings of Thucydidean oratory, the self-interested complaints of an uncomfortable bourgeois, and the thoughtful diatribe of one of the greatest thinkers of all the ages. Solon, Thucydides, Herodotus, Xenophon, The Old Oligarch (Pseudo-Xenophon), Isocrates, and Plato, all in their own way make their forceful contribution to the political philosophy of democracy. Newman compares the political philosopher in Greece to the prophets of another people (Israel);⁸ it is a thought which

⁶ Newman, 421
⁷ Ibid., 552
⁸ Ibid., 422
forces itself on any reader of Plato. The Socratic mission was, in a manner, a pagan counterpart of similar tasks carried on by divine commission among God's Chosen People.

To describe Aristotle's contribution to the theory of democracy would require another occasion. Aristotle is usually styled the founder of political science, but the *Politics* would be too vast a field to enter upon at this time, and all mention of Aristotelian theory will be studiously avoided. It is purposed to give a complete review of the discussions concerning Greek democracy in the writings of Plato and his predecessors; and to recommend as a supplement Greenidge's description of Athenian democracy at work in *A Handbook of Greek Constitutional History*. This book uses the best source available to achieve this latter end, namely, the Aristotelian treatise on the *Constitution of Athens*.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the original sources from which this study will be drawn, it will be helpful to point out two things: What a Greek meant by democracy, and what were the drawbacks in his system. The Greek did not find it necessary to use the word democracy because it was a desirable and popular word. He used it to express its true meaning, --DEMOS(People) and KRATIA (Rule). And in Athens the people actually ruled. An assembly of all the adult male citizens was the supreme political authority of the State, both executive and legislative. But for practical purposes the detailed administration of civic affairs was taken care
of by a council of five hundred citizens chosen by lot from the
general body of the citizens. All ruled by turn. The judicial
power of the State was in the hands of popular courts, the members
of which were also drawn by lot from the general assembly. The
people, the whole people, ruled and had an equal opportunity,
right, and duty to share in every kind of political authority. The
Greeks called this singular institution what it was,—Democracy,
the rule of the people.

The picture has another side, and Fowler, who always looks
for the best in the Athenian polity, is forced to make the follow­
ing admissions in his admirable and understanding work on The City-
State of the Greeks and Romans.

I said some way back that I should have a
word to say about the weak points in this wonder­
ful political creation of the Athenians. Draw­
backs there always have been, and always will be,
to every social organization which human nature
can devise and develop, and at Athens these were
so serious and so far-reaching in their consequen­
ces that the remainder of this chapter must be
occupied in a brief consideration of them.

In two ways, while realising 'the good
life' to such an extent as was practically poss­
ible in a City-State, Athens impinged upon what
we may be disposed to call the rights of other
individuals and States. She was, in the first
place, a slave-owning State. Secondly, in this
golden age of hers she was an imperial State whose
so-called 'allies', including nearly all the most
important cities in and around the Aegean Sea, were
obliged to obey her orders, or risk the chance of
severe punishment. Had she been neither a slave
State nor an imperial State, it is hardly possible
to suppose that she could have attained her high
political and intellectual level; and this re­
flexion, a somewhat melancholy one, needs a word
of explanation.

I have all along been treating Athens as a
democracy, and such, in the view of every Greek, she actually was. But we must not entirely forget that, judged by the standard of the nineteenth century, she was not really a democracy, but a slave-holding aristocracy. The number of slaves in Attica is now estimated at 100,000 at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, as against a free population of about 135,000. And this means that all their menial work, and no doubt a great part of the work which is now done by what we call the industrial classes, was done for the Athenians by persons who were in no sense members of the State, who had neither will nor status of their own, and whose one duty in life was to obey the orders of their masters.

Now we have to face the fact that the small City-State,--even such an one as Athens--could not reach the highest level of human life attainable in that day, without sacrificing the freedom and interests of other States whose capacity for good may have been as great as her own. Athens deprived the subjects of her empire of independence,--of the true political life of the Greek State,--and used their resources for her own glory and adornment. Pericles does not hesitate to tell the Athenians that their empire is a tyranny, and their state a tyrant.-'You have come by this tyranny,' he tells them, 'and you can not go back from it; you have outrun the tardy motion of the Greek world of political ideas.'

9 Fowler, 177-182.
CHAPTER ONE

SOLON THE FATHER OF GREEK DEMOCRACY

Alexander was a youth who led his phalanxes into history, founding the word of Empire in Western ears; Caesar was the stern

1 Aristotle, Constitution of Athens, 12
2 Demosthenes, De Falsa Legatione, 255
Roman who began to rule the world; Charlemagne was a symbol of medieval might and of chivalry and beauty; Napoleon was the soldier of Europe. These are great names. Their owners moulded and changed the civilization of their time, and mention of their names recalls to mind great vistas of human life and living. Yet it may be true to say that the few lines of Greek that head this chapter meant more to men than all the achievements of those great conquerors, men whose names have never left the lips of the world. The author's name is not unknown among the learned. Yet its mention is unlikely to inspire in men "that inevitable nostalgia for past greatness" that many another great name does. Undoubtedly it did so once, however. Solon in his time and in his homeland was revered as the keystone of Greek culture. He was the George Washington and the Benjamin Franklin and the Thomas Jefferson of the Athenian school boy of the fifth and fourth centuries. Washington was a statesman and soldier. Solon was a statesman and poet. Washington led. Solon created.

Dismissing for the moment Solon's actual political reforms, suppose we examine something of the spirit, the soul of Solon. Therein shall be found the spirit of all that was to be Athenian. In his unflinching ideals are mirrored all that has been done for THE PEOPLE from Solon's own day to this. Solon brought a new thing into human living. Perhaps other men conceived it, too. Certainly some inspired souls, and others also who were lost in the masses of down-trodden peoples, must have dreamed of it. But no one
before had ever actually brought this thing into being. Perhaps there was no courage before. At any rate, the world had had to wait for the man from whose great soul came forth the noble words that head this chapter.

---

'To the common people I have given,'—These are some of the most meaningful and bravest words ever written. Solon's words foreshadowed a "New Life". Before his time men were almost bond servants in the hands of the powerful, and power rested in the hands of the few. It was to remain with the few long after Solon, except in Athens, and even that home of freedom lost the key to liberty under the heel of the conqueror. Elsewhere a key was never found that would open the door all the way. But the road had been pointed out. Men now knew how, and they were inexorably bound to go through that door which opened out on freedom. The massive force that lay hidden in the hands of the great common mass of people had always been feared but never realized. That great restless bulk of humanity, seething behind the pages of history, never emerging unless to do the will of their masters, had never been conceived as a power unto itself. We know it now, because we have seen it run wild. But the Athenian did not know it nor did any man. We have seen that power in the mob that swept through Paris during the blood-stained nights of the French Revolution. Plato thought he saw it and

---

3 Aristotle, 12
hated it. Solon brought it into being, moulded it, loved it, gave it to the common people. Try to imagine a world without liberty; there are men without it and countries that never had it, others that have lost it. But take away the idea of freedom, think of a world where it had never existed, even to dream of. Then we know what Solon was and what he did.

Solon was an Athenian. His great day came about the year 600 B.C. Keen civil strife had arisen between the upper and lower classes of Athenian society. The Athenian constitution had permitted loans to be secured on the persons of the debtors, and the land had passed into the hands of a few citizens. Naturally this situation amounted to virtual slavery for great numbers of the population. But the trouble was so widespread that those who were united by their common woes became strong enough to equalize by the brute force of their numbers the power of the wealthy few. The poor were united in their clamorings for a redivision of the land into equal portions. The rich had run into an impossible situation; their lands were crowded with debt-slaves, a discontented and ill-producing lot. Both were ready for a change, and it came when both parties agreed to the appointment of Solon as mediator.

"By common consent they chose Solon as mediator and Archon and put

4 Ibid., 2, 2.
5 Ibid., 5, 2.
the constitution in his hands."

Solon laid the blame for the miserable situation on the covetousness and insolence of the wealthy class. The desperate condition of the country called for immediate and drastic action, and, once elevated to a position of absolute power, Solon liberated the people once and for all, by prohibiting all loans on the security of the debtor's person. To this law which destroyed forever the serfdom of the people of Athens another decree was added which brought immediate relief to all those who had already been enslaved. Solon canceled all debts public and private. This measure, the most renowned of Solon's reforms, came to be known as the Seisachtheia, the "Shaking Off of Burdens".

In these iambics quoted by Aristotle in the Constitution of Athens Solon with keen insight calls upon the black Earth to witness how he had removed the stones of her bondage which had been

6 Ibid., 5, 3
7 Ibid., 12, 4
planted everywhere, and how she that had been a slave was now free. By choosing this figure of a free earth to explain his accomplish­ments Solon reveals the motives that actuated his reforms. There was no question in his mind of an ideal polity. He was building no Utopia. He was a practical Greek with a practical end in view. He saw that a free earth made free men, and he scraped out cleanly the sickness that was rotting the core of the Athenian agricultural population. Briefly, there were three points in Solon's reforms which reached farthest. They were as well the more democratic features of his constitution. The first and greatest of these was the prohibition against securing a loan on the debtor's person; the second was the right of every person who so willed to claim the benefit of the law on behalf of those who were suffering wrong; the third was the institution of the right of appeal to the people's court. According to the author of the Constitution of Athens it is this last reform, the right of appeal, that gave the masses their greatest power. "If the people are masters of the voting-power, they are masters of the constitution." The immediate application is apparent;--the people rule. The new polity is 

Right at this point where the circumstances attending the birth of the new polity are understood, it will be well to examine

8 Ibid., 9, 1.
9 Ibid., 9, 1.
what the purpose of the change was. Solon did not plan blindly. He acted too well for that.

First, the question arises: What was Solon striving for ultimately? The answer lies in his own words. *γιὰ τὸν κύριον, καὶ μὴ φοβερὰς ἑρωτεύεσθαι ἡ λάβη μὴ τὴν προσβολὴν ἢ ἡμῶν καὶ τὰς ἱδρυίας παιρομεῖν.* 10 "I am alive to the fact, and the pain lies deep within my breast, as I see the oldest home of the Ionian race being slain by the sword." Solitude for his homeland lay deep in his heart. He saw the immense evils in the violent feud that had split the state for a long time. 11 He himself belonged by birth and reputation to the highest class, but his limited means and business activities put him in the middle class. 12 Yet he does not hesitate to speak out strongly against the wealthy class because he blamed them, in general, for the dissension.

*Εὐμείς ἀγαθάκτες ἐν φρεσίν ἐὰν τεράν ἡμᾶς ἐν πολλῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐν πάναν ἀλάστορας, ἐν μετρίωσι τιρεσθε μέγαν νόον, οὔτε ἡμῖν ἐσιομεθα, οὔτε έμῖν ἀρτιὰ πάρτε, ἐστελ.* 13

"Calm the strong feelings of your hearts, you who have forced your way to a satiety of good things. Hold in check your vain

10 Ibid., 5, 2
11 Ibid., 5, 3
12 Ibid., 5, 3
13 Ibid., 5, 3
thoughts. Neither shall we obey you, nor will you find everything suitable to you."

Peace was Solon's aim, and he put the blame for the lack of it on the wealthy. But above all Solon was a fair-minded man. This indeed is his finest quality, and, as we shall see, a quality that led him to choose the particular reforms that he did. Therefore he avoided with great caution any undue alienation of the rich. In the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter he gives his platform. "To the common people I have given such a measure of privilege as sufficeth them, neither robbing them of the rights they had, nor holding out the hope of greater ones; and I have taken equal thought for those who were possessed of power and who were looked up to because of their wealth, careful that they, too, should suffer no indignity. I have taken a stand which enables me to hold a stout shield over both groups, and I have allowed neither to triumph unjustly over the other." In this passage is found, I think, the focal point of Solon's political reforms. You will remember that he says: "I stood holding my strong shield over both parties." He tried to make it plain that he wished to give every man what was his due. His first act

---

14 Ibid., 5, 3
15 Ibid., 12, 1; translated in I.M. Linforth, Solon the Athenian, Macmillan Co., New York, 1920, 135
16 Aristotle, 12, 1
was to cut out with the surgeon's knife the rotten core of Athenian society, first, by removing permanently the possibility of further self-enslavement, and, secondly, by freeing those who had already fallen victim to the debtor's fate. Thenceforth every move of Solon was intended to protect the people in their new economic and political freedom. No more did he wish to see the welfare of the people, either rich of poor, depend on the whim and fancy of those who held power. Surely there was some other norm for right than might. Casting about for a firm foothold on which he might take his stand, Solon could not fail to see that lawlessness was the chief cause of the ills from which the city suffered.

Putting his finger on the cause of the evil, Solon immediately counters with his remedy. It is contained in the second passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter. In the first, as we saw, there was expressed Solon's ideal of justice. In the second we see his high regard for the rule of law as a norm and a protection for justice. He says: "A law-abiding spirit createth order and harmony, and at the same time putteth chains upon evildoers; it maketh rough things smooth, it checketh inordinate desires, it dimmeth the glare of wanton pride and withereth the budding bloom of wild delusion; it maketh crooked judgments

17 Demosthenes, 255
straight and softeneth arrogant behavior; it stoppeth acts of sedition and stoppeth the anger of bitter strife. Under the reign of law, sanity and wisdom prevail ever among men."

Justice and law are taken as a matter of course today. During the course of the centuries we have built up an elaborate judicial and political system. In the United States, for instance, there is at the base of our system a written Constitution by which all, even those who rule, must abide. The ancient world, however, saw little of this ideal of justice. Authority had been centered in the household and the clan rather than in the people as a whole or in the state. Justice was more the responsibility of the individual to his friends and to those who had the means to enforce it. The individual did not feel his responsibility as a citizen to his fellow-citizen, nor was he zealous to do his part in the maintenance of justice. The result was that nowhere could there be found sufficient power to dispense equal justice to all men whatever their station. Solon's task was to school men differently, to secure the reign of law, with justice for every man. He chose two means to carry out his purpose; he picked an unchanging voice, one whose demands could never be silenced in the face of injustice. He vested authority in the people, made them masters of the Constitution and gave them an unfailing means to combat injustice. First, he gave every man the right to prosecute the evil-

18 Ibid., 255; trans. in Linforth, 141
doer, whenever seen, and, secondly, he instituted the right of appeal to an assembly of all the citizens. No more could the magistrate defeat justice by delivering 'crooked judgments'. He had Solon's written code to abide by, and, failing that, he had to face the assembled body of the citizens and give an account of his office and his actions before he left his magistracy. Thus did the law begin to rule the Athenians, and people become free; Athens was on the way to democracy, for good or for ill.

It is not to be supposed that Solon accomplished all he did without opposition. He met bitter and often unfair criticism, and he seems to have foreseen the cause for complaint that Plato and Aristotle would find in democracy. He did not himself, as we know, establish the democracy. That was to come later. He merely opened the way,--so that it is probable that he would have found a much wider basis of agreement with the later critics of democracy than would many of its more liberal exponents during its heyday. An indication of this attitude is found in one of Solon's sayings, quoted in Aristotle's Constitution of Athens. There he explains what he believes to be the right way to deal with the people.

The populace will follow its leaders best if it is neither left too free nor subjected to too much restraint. For excess giveth birth to arrogance,
when great prosperity attendeth upon men, whose minds lack sober judgment. 19

Plato would have found a more destructive way to express the same sentiments, when in a later day he unreservedly condemned what less prudent men had permitted the people. But Plato surely could have spoken no more moderately and sensibly than Solon. This remarkable legislator put teeth into his convictions by deliberately setting out to put a limit to the people's prerogatives, as he tells us himself:

"Another man would not have held the people back." A strong man, Solon resisted the temptation to let the people run wild with the new economic and social privileges. He paid dearly for his restraint and complains that he had to stand out like a wolf at bay amidst a pack of hounds, defending himself against attacks from every side.

19 Aristotle, 12, 2; trans. in Linforth, 135.
20 Aristotle, 12, 4.
2. Ibid., 12, 4.
understood the ignorance and folly that an unguided mob would be capable of, either because of mass adulation or mass blindness, and he warned the people against it. "The people through their own folly sink into slavery under a single lord. Having raised a man to too high a place, it is not easy later to hold him back; now is the time to be observant of all things."22

In his own lifetime Solon saw his predictions unheeded and the tyranny established. Then there came from his lips the first bitter words, spoken in his disappointment, and long sharpened by his own prophetic foresight of what the ignorant crowd could do.

If ye have suffered the melancholy consequences of your own incompetence, do not attribute this evil fortune to the gods. Ye have yourselves raised these men to power over you, and have reduced yourselves by this course to a wretched state of servitude. Each man among you, individually, walketh with the tread of the fox, but collectively ye are a set of simpletons. For ye look to the tongue and the play of a man's speech, and regard not the deed which is done before your eyes.23

Solon knew as well as any man the weakness of democracy. It was not always the rational state, not always wisest in its choices. Democracy was not strong under foreign attack; it was guilty of "incompetence". The voice of the people could be a power wielded by a "set of simpletons". Democracy was vulnerable to the blandishments of a strong popular leader. But Solon, wise in the wisdom of the Seven Ancient Sages of Greece, knew, as every man who ruled Athens was to learn, that his task was done and done well,

22 Diodorus Siculus, IX, 20; trans. in Linforth, 145
23 Ibid., 145
that the only man who could rule the Athenians now would be a "popular" man, of the people.
CHAPTER TWO
THE HISTORIANS AND GREEK DEMOCRACY
HERODOTUS AND THUCYDIDES

PART ONE--HERODOTUS

The transit from the creator of Athenian democracy and of her whole political culture to the Father of History, who lived and wrote a full century and a half or more after Solon, may seem somewhat precipitous. But no apologies need be offered for the caprices of historical records. Herodotus' fatherhood of so elemental a science as that of history shows how complete and how empty must be the gap between Solon's time and his, in so far as written records are concerned. Herodotus is the first great name for history. He is also one of the earliest writers of prose, and is certainly the first truly important prose author that we have. It is part of the sad inadequacy of ancient studies that for one hundred and fifty years, from the time when democracy had not even been named as such but had only been planted by Solon as a new seed to await the freshening of a distant Spring, until she burst forth in her full bloom, giving birth to the glorious fifth century of Athens, we can read no word of her, either in praise or in blame.

Herodotus comes to the story of democracy not as an historian. His value there is negligible compared to the storehouse of
information discovered in Aristotle's *Constitution of Athens*. But as a man of the fifth century, who lived for a great while in Athens or in her colonies and was possibly a citizen,\(^1\) he has a peculiarly Athenian contribution to democracy. After Solon's creation of their ideal citizenship the Athenian was little by little schooled to the realization of his own importance in the working of the Athenian city-state. Educated individually to the knowledge that each one had some role to play in the business of State, knowing that inevitably the lot would fall upon him to play his part, joyful and eager to support the direction of the State with all his strength, yet fearful sometimes lest the unseeing lot would raise him to heights beyond the power of his wits to carry him, the Athenian was first and foremost a citizen. And breathing deeply the spirit of freedom his city bred, the Athenian was a democrat.

Democracy, in itself, is government by discussion. It is government 'by the word'. And all things are thrown for settlement into an arena in which 'one shrewd thought devours another'. From the constant discussions of political detail the citizens of a Greek democracy naturally rose to the discussion of political principles. Democracy cannot exist on inherited and unexplained tradition. It lives in the free air of nimble thought, and the discussion of principles is as vital to its life as the discussion of policies.\(^2\)

The Third Book of Herodotus\(^3\) is the first manifestation that

---

3 Herodotus, III, 80-82.
we have of the lively interest of the free Athenians in discussing the principles of government. Inevitably in a political society like that of the Greeks such discussions would find permanent record, and thus we find the Father of History taking respite from the customary toil and relaxing in the pleasure of discussing the question which was, we may suppose, the constant fare of those who were creating political science amid the everyday life of the market-square.

Fully half of Herodotus' work consists of digressions. To one such we owe the remarkable debate which Herodotus narrates in the course of his history of Persia. The Historian would have three Persian grandees discussing the respective merits of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. This debate gives the earliest known comparison of the three constitutions. Its value can be estimated by the fact that Whibley puts it down as something of a discovery to find that the scientific terms of monarchy, oligarchy and democracy were in use. "Thus μουραρτιν, τοπαρχις, δικαιαρχιν occur in the debate in Herodotus, iii, 80-82. He uses δημοκρατιες there to describe democracy: but in vi, 43, συμορατιν is found."4 When Herodotus uses these words, he has been taken away from his story and is digressing. Such a topic and such a discussion does not ring true on proper Persian lips. The Persian

4 L(eonard) Whibley, Greek Oligarchies, The Classification of Constitutions, Methuen, London, 1896, 3
was an Asiatic, and the Asiatic always loved the despot. He, at least, had usually turned in that direction.

The debate attributed with grotesque inappropriateness to the three Persian nobles is nothing else than a representation of Hellenic institutions and a reflection of Hellenic ideas. (The debate as a whole is unreal and impossible, but the characteristics attributed to the constitutions are entirely Greek and un-Oriental)."

The point of history that brought on this unusual debate makes an intriguing little tale. A group of Persian noblemen, seven of the highest rank in the kingdom, discovered that there ruled over Persia by means of trickery and fraud a Magian who called himself Smerdis, Cyrus' Son. These Grandees were Otanes, Intaphrenes, Gobryas, Megabyzus, Aspathines, Hydarnes, and Darius. They conspired together to rid the realm of the usurper and succeeded. Afterwards the rebels held a council on the whole state of affairs, at which words were uttered "which to some Greeks seem incredible." Three of the council advanced their views on the future course of the Persian government, Otanes speaking for democracy, Megabyzus for oligarchy, and Darius, who was ultimately to become king, for monarchy. Two remarkable facts stand out in the story that Herodotus tells. First of all, the discussion itself

5 Ibid., 3
6 Herodotus, III, 67-88
7 Ibid., 67-70
8 Ibid., 70
9 Ibid., 71-79
10 Ibid., 80-82
was so astonishing that even the Greeks of his own time lost no
time in telling Herodotus that it was incredible, and three
books later we still find Herodotus vainly trying to establish the
fact that Otanes the Persian "declared his opinion among the Seven
that democracy was best for Persia." Secondly, those who took
part in this amazing debate were remarkable men. Their complete
accord and reasonableness, their devotedness to their common cause
and to each other, their uncommon ability to think of government
in terms of the people's welfare, was nothing short of wonderful
for their day.

Signally sensible men as they were, according to the story,
they could agree on one or two common points. They all admitted
that all three of the types of government under discussion suffered
from serious evils which ultimately made the people suffer the
effects of the of others. In other words, none of the
polities they suggested had a protection against its own ignorant
caprice, no rule of thumb by which to judge the fitness of things,
no policing power to restrain overweening and selfish desires
other than its own self-control, always a fragile thing, at best,
in the hands of the mob, preyed upon by jealousy and ambition in
the hands of the few, and the play-thing of the passionate nature
of man in the hands of the One. The solution, had they known it,
was to be either the mixed polity,—the constitutional monarchy,

11 Ibid., 80
12 Ibid., VI, 43
as it is called, or the American State, which achieved stability and permanence through a separation of the executive, legislative and judicial functions of the government.

The best that each of the grandees could say for his polity is contained in the definitions that each was careful to give. Otanes gives a descriptive definition of democracy:

\[
\text{Πλανόσ δὲ ἄρχον τρῆτα μὲν οὐνάμα πάνων ἡλιστον ἕξει; ἰσονομίαν πάλι μὲν ἄρχει ἄρχει, ὑπενθυνον δὲ ἄρχει ἕξει, βουλεύματα δὲ πάρτα ἐς τὸ οὐνόν ἀναρχεί. ἐναρτῇ τῷ πολλῷ ἐνὶ τὰ πάρτα. 13}
\]

First of all, the rule of the multitude has the most excellent name of all, signifying equality before the law. Offices are held according to lot, and those who hold them have to give an account of their conduct afterwards; and all decrees are brought up before the general assembly.

Megabyzus gives the essence of oligarchy more briefly as: \( \text{Τὸ κράτος τῶν ἁγιλίων ἄρσων τῶν ἀριστῶν, "the rule of a company of the best men."} 14 \) Monarchy, of course, is: \( \text{Τὸ κράτος ἄρσης ἐκὸς τοῦ ἀριστοῦ, "the rule of the one best man."} 15 \)

All the best that could be said for democracy has been included in Otanes' definition. Three salient points stand out: equality before the law; an elective office for the executive

13 Ibid., III, 80
14 Ibid., 81
15 Ibid., 82
power, which is responsible before the people for its conduct in office, and the right of an assembly of citizens to exercise deliberative power.\textsuperscript{16} This is a definition that states sufficiently well what Herodotus knew of democracy. He has, however, neglected one important point. To find the cause of this oversight it is well to consider the significant fact that Herodotus was not himself an Athenian and therefore not schooled in the long Solonian tradition. It may be for this reason that Herodotus missed something of the Athenian spirit of democracy and failed to realize that it was not the people who ruled Athens but the Law.

The other participants, both the oligarchist and the monarchist, save their severest strictures for democracy. They speak of the foolishness and violence of the useless mob.\textsuperscript{17} They find the insolence and the license of the unbridled multitude unbearable. The people are ignorant, headlong, blind, "like a river in flood," more tyrannical than the worst tyrant, incapable of keeping the public peace, unable to save themselves from revolt, and, like a blind mob, they follow the man who champions their cause and make him tyrant.\textsuperscript{18} This picture of the foibles and fall of democracy, black as it is, was only too vivid for the Greek who had seen this very fate come upon the Athenians again and again. On the face of it, then, democracy must defend itself on many a score.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 80
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 81
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 81-82
Oligarchy has a simple case to present. It says: Choose a company of the best men, invest them with power, and it is likely that there will prevail the best counsels.\textsuperscript{20} It sounds reasonable. A state with such public servants should convert itself into a veritable Utopia. The rule of Wisdom and of Virtue! No man could conceive a more ideal polity. But wisdom and virtue do not always sit easily on man. They must struggle and be overcome and overcome themselves once again before they can remain with men. They must conquer jealousy and greed, ambition, enmity, and the individuality of man and man.\textsuperscript{21} Fame must die, honor must live on equal terms; peace must be the end of every quarrel. Else there is civil war, faction against faction, and bloodshed follows.\textsuperscript{22} And it did follow, as anyone can see who cares to read the story. The end of bloodshed, as well as the end of the story, is monarchy. One man prevails and leaves no place for strife.

Thus did Darius argue. We might say that he used the "argument from history": The champion of the people and the strong man putting an end to civil strife, both ultimately becoming monarchs, are convincing arguments for the practical statesman.\textsuperscript{23} Why, he will say, argue against experience? But there are other inducements. He asks what could be better than the rule of the one best man, who will govern with perfect wisdom.\textsuperscript{24} It is an intriguing
picture. But the one best man, -- who will find him? How will he be recognized? Darius suggests he will come on the heels of violence, using violent means himself, shedding more blood to end bloodshed, thus proving himself, forcibly, to be the one best man, and no doubt about it. After he has established himself, then he will be wise and just, having regard for the people's welfare. Now Darius makes a shrewd point. He says that the monarch will best conceal plans for the defeat of enemies. The over-all strategy of a single man in the capable conduct of foreign policy is the strongest point of monarchy. It makes the monarch strong where democracy, and, to a lesser degree, oligarchy is weakest. The inability or, at the very least, the slowness of a democracy to act on delicate questions of foreign policy or of military importance continually puts it at a disadvantage. Darius struck home on this point, most certainly. He was talking to statesmen; the men before him were soldiers. His concluding appeal, an indifferent thing to our study, was to tradition. There he says that it was ill done to repeal the laws of their fathers.

There had been need for Darius to bring forth his strongest arguments. The men to whom he was speaking had lived long under the despot's thumb and knew well the dangerous course tyranny
might take. Power in the hands of a single man is heady wine, and even the best man can succumb gradually to the intoxication of it. The strongest point for democracy against the monarch is that the latter can do as he wills and cannot be held accountable for his conduct. The people must be dependent upon his benevolence for their own protection. There is more power for good in monarchy, but the monarch's power for evil is also multiplied. It all depends upon the man, and right there stands the weakness of monarchy.

The debate over, four of the Seven declared for monarchy and consulted as to what was the justest way of making a king. Thereby hangs a curious tale,—an illuminating reflection on what Darius glibly called "the one best man". They resolved that he should be elected king whose horse should be first to neigh at sunrise, while they together would be riding out through the suburb of the city. Darius left nothing to chance. A clever groom of his brought a mare that was especially favored by Darius' horse, and tethered the two in the suburb by night. At dawn the six came out to the suburb as agreed, and on reaching the place where the mare had been picketed, Darius' horse trotted up to it and whinnied. Thus did Darius become king. One wonders whether to love monarchy less or Herodotus more.

29 Ibid., 80
30 Ibid., 83
31 Ibid., 84-86
PART TWO--THUCYDIDES

Thucydides created political history. Herodotus was not a political historian, for like many others he wrote political history in a non-political spirit. In the quiet city of Halicarnassus where he was born, he had seen nothing of political life; and when he first met it in full swing in post-war Athens, he took no part in it, but looked on from outside as an admiring spectator. Thucydides on the other hand was a true citizen of Periclean Athens, and the breath of life to Periclean Athens was political activity. Since the social upheavals of the sixth century, when Solon had laid the foundation for the sound political sense which early distinguished the Athenians from their Ionian kinsmen, every leading citizen of Athens had taken part in politics, and the Athenians had thereby acquired a vast body of political experience and well-marked political ideas.\[32\]

The testimony of such a man on any point of political history is invaluable and, we might say, unique. His account is trustworthy beyond all others, first, because he was himself identified with the greatest days of the Athenian democracy, secondly, because he lived long enough to see the beginning of the decline and was therefore in a better critical position to estimate truly the defects in the Athenian system that led to deterioration, and, thirdly, because the principles that guided him in his writing were no less exacting than those of the best modern historical method, as he explains himself:

The events of the war I did not think good to describe on the authority of any chance information, nor according to my own estimate of probabilities; what I relate, I was either present at myself, or, in accepting the witness of others for it, I tested every detail with exactitude to the utmost of my ability."

What Thucydides writes, even when it is expressed as his own opinion, can be read with a certain amount of confidence in the rectitude and judiciousness of the opinion. So invaluable is this confidence that we may accept Thucydides' reflections on democracy as the fairest and most accurate picture of the Athenian system as it really existed and as it was viewed by thoughtful, sensible, patriotic citizens. Thucydides did not live in a dream world. He had seen the greatest things that democracy could achieve and has ever achieved. He saw it fail, and fail miserably, from its own defects. He did not live to join in bitter recrimination when the evils of Athens had multiplied nor to make the mistake of piling all the errors on democracy's grave.

Thucydides himself had suffered at the hands of Athenian democracy, earning twenty years of exile after his failure at Amphipolis, but no trace of bias appears in his work. Any resentment he may have harbored against the people or political parties seems to have been kept in bounds by his passionate love for his country. His own position seems to have been a steady and proud loyalty to Athenian democracy, although he leans, possibly because

33 Thucydides, 1, 22, 2-4
of his historical sense, to some limitation of democratic license. He gives expression to this latter attitude when, after recounting the overthrow of the Four Hundred and the establishment of a qualified democracy in the hands of the Five Thousand,—every man who could furnish himself with a hoplite's outfit belonged to this number,—he says: οὖν ἡ κοινότης ἐπὶ τῇ ἑμοὶ Ἀθηναῖοι φαίνονται εὖ πολιτεύσαντες. μετρία γὰρ ἦ τε ἐσ τῶς ὀλίγους καὶ τῶς πολλῶς σύννομος ἔστειλεν. "The Athenians appear to have enjoyed the best government they ever had, at least in my time; for there was a moderate blending of the few and the many." 34

A short time after these words were written Thucydides' History came to an end. These are, then, Thucydides' final words on democracy. They marked the historian's approval of a moderate democracy based upon a property qualification. His acceptance of this form should cause no reproach at that early date, since, if we should care to examine into the matter, we would find that our own Founding Fathers centuries later always intended to limit the voting privilege of the new Republic on just such a basis. Nor did this last expression of his on democracy change considerably Thucydides' former sentiments on democracy. Hitherto all his reflections on the constitution of Athens had been dominated by the masterful figure of Pericles, and all his disquieting fears for

the good of his beloved city at the hands of a fickle mob were calmed by the sight of Pericles' guiding genius. He well knew the influence of this great statesman on the people and his ability to "lead it rather than be lead by it", how he could oppose their ignorant desires and cow them into submission while respecting their liberties and how, if they began to be afraid in time of crisis or peril, he could hearten them. Thucydides realized that Athens under Pericles was a democracy in name only and had gradually become a government ruled by its foremost citizen. εὐφύρετο τε λόγω μὲν εὐμορφατίᾳ, ἐμφυὲς δὲ ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ ἄρσεν ἀρχαί. 36

It would be unreasonable to conclude that Thucydides implied any censure of this new development. Quite the contrary, he has nothing but the greatest praise for the government under Pericles and takes evident enjoyment and justifiable pride in relating its achievements. In putting this wholehearted approval on the Periclean democracy he has, in the interpretation of Werner Jaeger, anticipated the later philosophical theory that the best possible constitution was a mixed one. In his opinion, the Athenian democracy is not the realization of the mechanical ideal of external equality, which some worship as the height of justice and others condemn as the depth of injustice. That is shown by his description of Pericles as the 'first citizen', who really ruled the state. In Athens, he says, every man is alike before the law, but in politics the

35 Thucydides, ii, 65, 10
36 Ibid., ii, 65, 10
aristocracy of talent is supreme. Logically, that implies the principle that if one man is supremely valuable and important he will be recognized as the ruler of the state. This conception would, on the one hand, allow that the political activity of each individual has some value for the community; yet it also admits the fact—recognized in Thucydides even by the radical demagogue Cleon—that the people alone cannot possibly govern a large and difficult empire. Thucydides considers that Periclean Athens was a happy solution of a problem which was becoming acute in the state of 'freedom and equality', that is, in the complete democracy of mob-rule—the problem of the relationship which ought to exist between a superior individual and the political community.

History has shown that this solution depends on the appearance of a genius to lead the state—an accident as uncommon in a democracy as in other types of state. 37

No more striking example of the lack of prodigality with which history has supplied democracy with such inspired leadership can be chosen than the plight in which Athens found herself after she lost the genius of Pericles. 38 His successors were more of a piece, mediocre men lacking the talent to rise to supremacy on their own merits. Consequently in the struggle for the foremost place in the state, they were prepared in their lust for power to surrender to the whims of the people even in the conduct of public affairs. This was a fateful mistake for a great and imperial state to make. The people are not prepared themselves to balance and judge delicate questions of foreign policy and military strategy. Many blunders resulted, especially the disastrous Sicilian

37 Jaeger, 406
38 Thucydides, ii, 65, 10-13
expedition, which Thucydides says was not so much an error of judgment as of mismanagement. For lack of capable, strong leadership the city was given over to confusion, personal intrigue, and civil discord, which inevitably communicated itself to the military expedition. Abbot remarks that want of discipline rendered the Athenians disobedient and intractable in Sicily.

They brought to the camp the habits of the agora: their general found it impossible to control them. Intractable at all times, they became hopelessly demoralised by misfortune. Under the influence of panic they refused to fight; under the influence of impatience they threw themselves pell-mell into a river, with the enemy close behind them.

So did the splendor of the imperial city begin to pass, guilty of its own folly.

Democracy at its worst was at the mercy of its ears. It was a mere spectator of words and a hearer of deeds. A slave of each new paradox, a scorner of what is familiar, whimsical, suspicious, superstitious, and there are more serious charges. Democracy was

39 Ibid., ii, 65, 11.
41 Thucydides, iii, 38; vii, 48
42 Ibid., iii, 38
43 Ibid., iii, 38
44 Ibid., iii, 38
45 Ibid., iii, 38
46 Ibid., ii, 65
47 Ibid., iii, 43; vi, 53
48 Ibid., vii, 50
unjust, subject to private ambitions and greed, incompetent to govern others, imprudent in decisions; neither wise nor equitable. It was besides disobedient and intractable, impatient, panic-stricken, and inconsistent with itself. Alcibiades, finally, told the Lacedaemonians that it was an admitted folly, _ἐποδοξογεύμεν ἀδόξα_.

At its best, a glorious best, democracy was worth its faults. The splendid eulogy that Thucydides put into the mouth of Pericles as he delivered the Funeral Oration over the fallen soldiers of Athens is the best statement we have of the ideals of democratic Athens. This speech, as well as the other numerous speeches throughout the _History_ is the means that Thucydides consistently chose to express his own political ideas. It is, therefore, in view of the character of the writer, a trustworthy and sane account of the high regard for democracy felt by the better and more intelligent citizens of the time. They were so convinced that their form of government was the best of its day that they thought it should be a model for the imitation of other peoples. Pericles was not slow to tell the people, and they were content to accept

49 Ibid., ii, 59-60; v, 26
50 Ibid., ii, 65
51 Ibid., iii, 37
52 Ibid., iii, 43
53 Ibid., vi, 39
54 Ibid., vii, 14; vii, 72
55 Ibid., vii, 84
56 Ibid., vii, 72
57 Ibid.; vii, 59-60; viii, 1
58 Ibid.; vi, 89
59 Ibid.; ii, 35-46
what he said as an accomplished fact, that theirs was not a mechanical equality. All stood the same before the law, for their own protection. All had equal opportunities, but only those with superior political ability could achieve public honors. Poverty was no bar to public office, nor was obscurity of rank. Personal merit was the only qualification. And no man was hindered from taking part in public affairs, nay, it was each man’s duty to do so. Μόνοι γὰρ τὸν τε μὴνεῦ τὴν τῆς μεταφορὰς οὐκ ἄραμωσε, ἀλλ’ ὧπετός ὁμήγερον. "For we alone consider the man taking no part in these affairs not as one minding his own business, but as good for nothing."60

Thus did the supporters of the Athenian constitution view it as the true State,

where man was equal to man, and an impartial law ruled all—A State which served no particular interest, but did justice to every class. Democracy made room for the rich in finance, the wise in council, the masses in decision.61

This was the State that lived a Golden Age, that experienced the "good life" perhaps more than any other. It provided the spirit relaxation from toil: games and sacrifices and homes fitted out with elegance and good taste, providing days filled with pleasure; and the city became so great because of it that all the products of all the earth flowed in upon it; all the poetry, music, and art of men found there a congenial home.62 But

60 Ibid., ii, 40, 2.
61 Barker, 150.
62 Thucydides, ii, 38.
ever there, behind the richness and the color, stands the watchful figure of Pericles, guiding, restraining, leading the State onward and upward. Incorruptible\(^6\) and strong and wise beyond his generation he held the mob back from their follies, as long as they would have him, and using their energies wisely, employed them under his guidance as active forces in the direction of the State.

\(^6\) Ibid., ii, 65, 8
CHAPTER THREE

THE OLD OLIGARCH--A CRITIC OF ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY

There exists among the minor works of Xenophon a short manuscript of about ten pages which has been described as "the earliest known political treatise in any language".¹ Relying on internal evidence, Botsford and Sihler express the opinion that "the author was a man of mature years, experience, and judgment";² and place the appearance of the booklet about 425 or 424 B.C. In the Companion to Greek Studies Leonard Whibley says that the author composed the work between 424 and 420 B.C.;³ while Gilbert Norwood concludes that there is good reason to place the book in the years 431-428 B.C.⁴ This discussion is of considerable importance and interest in itself, because it concerns what is evidently "the oldest extant piece of literary Attic prose."⁵ Now, although we have certain indications concerning the date of its composition, and these are all amply discussed by Professor Norwood and may be found in an accessible source by anyone who cares to do so,⁶ little

² Ibid., 222
⁵ Whibly, 156; cf. Norwood, Class. Jour., 373-382
⁶ Norwood, 373-382
or nothing is known of the author. Certainly it was not Xenophon. The book was written early in the Peloponnesian War, at a time, according to the dates generally accepted, before Xenophon was born, or when he was a small boy. This matter is all discussed by Norwood, who inclines to Critias, the famous leader of the Thirty Tyrants, as the most likely author. The work certainly antedates Thucydides, and, as shall be seen, its view of Athenian democracy is of an opposite nature from that idealized picture of the Funeral Oration. The supposition, and it must remain such, of Critias' authorship is quite in character with the nature of the booklet, since for years the author has been known as the Old Oligarch.

Whoever he was, he was a man who had seen a momentous and glorious age, and had come away singularly unimpressed by it. He seems to have seen all the blemishes of democracy and was willing to talk about them candidly and coolly. There is a "cold and passionless detachment on the part of the writer, who sets forth his facts statistically and without emotion, and leaves the reader to pass upon them what judgment he pleases." Yet, in the face of his hostile spirit, his pamphlet marks the beginning of no campaign to oust the democracy, nor was it intended to do anything of the kind. The cool little way he finishes is anything but

7 Ibid., 373-382
8 Ibid., 381
inflammatory. He remarks that there is very little danger, or hope—since it is possible that he was talking for the benefit of warmer-blooded oligarchic friends—of any successful attack upon the democracy of Athens.\(^\text{10}\)

The writer, in fact, seems to have conceived a left-handed admiration for the Athenian democracy. His right hand with its surer grasp of things told him that the democracy put a man of his class, with his educational and material advantages, his savoir faire, in a ridiculous position. By talent and position he was naturally fitted to take a leading place in affairs of state. Yet only he could do that who would satisfy the passions and prejudices of the ignorant mob which ruled Athens. A man of his rank could hardly condone this clear-cut folly, that the Athenian constitution put the base(\(\text{oινοριφ}\)) in a better position than the good(\(\text{αύτοι}\)). The use of the word \(\text{οροσίς}\) in the booklet under consideration, \(\text{οιναιους Πολιτείας}\), I, i, is revealing. It means useful, serviceable, \textit{deserving}. \(\text{οροσίς}\) conveys the opposite idea, —of something causing pain or hardship, useless. No doubt about it, this man was an uncompromising snob. He was completely absorbed in the welfare of his own class and has no sympathy or interest for the common people. Nevertheless he confesses a grudging admiration for the Athenian system. An old realist himself, he can see the wisdom of ignorance and the

\(^{10}\) (Xenophon), \textit{De Republica Atheniensium}, III, 13.
advantages of folly, and he respects, with a certain amount of
cynicism, the way in which democracy has made the best out of what
he thinks is a corrupt intention and a bad choice. Granted their
corrupt intention they have succeeded very well in preserving the
people's power and gathering for themselves every material advan-
tage.

The unknown author appreciates the people's claim to power. It is the poorer classes who man the ships that give the city its
power. The great fleet is the back-bone of the Athenian city-state,
not the heavy-armed hoplites nor the men of influence and charac-
ter. And so it seems just for them who make the city powerful to
share in the offices of state and that they do this both by way of
the lot and election, on the basis of strict equality. Otherwise
the well-born and the rich would again obtain predominance over
the poor, and the democracy would be lost.

In every land the best element is opposed to dem-
cracy, for in the best element there is least
excess and injustice, and the greatest care for
what is good, whereas in the people there is
most ignorance and unruliness and rascality; for
poverty inclines them rather to what is base,
as do absence of education and ignorance
owing
to the lack in individual cases of means.11

The people, realizing their inferiority, make it their constant
intention to keep the element opposed to them from becoming strong.
In this, they are very wise.

11 Ibid., I., 5.
The people are not lured forward by mere lust for power. Their poverty has made them esteem more the posts that carry with them salary and personal advantage.\textsuperscript{12} They are satisfied to permit those of the highest standing to fill the posts of general or of cavalry commander or of any other position on which the safety of the whole State depends, recognizing that they are more benefited by not themselves holding those offices which, when badly fitted, could bring disaster upon the State and them.

In Athens it is not the most capable and best man who speaks and deliberates. That would be dangerous for the democracy, since he would speak for men of his own position and for good government. The Athenians love the worthless man who gets up whenever he wishes and speaks and attains whatever is good for himself and for those of his own class and for what is the opposite of good government.

It might be said: what would such a man know that was good for himself or for the people? But the people realize that his ignorance and rascality and friendship towards themselves are more profitable than the virtue and wisdom and hostility of the honorable man.\textsuperscript{13}

The democracy draws strength and freedom from this practice, caring little for making the best kind of city. And in this they are wise, for in this way the democratic constitution is best preserved.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., I, 3
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., I, 7
If you look for good government, you will see, in the first place, the most capable men legis­lating for the community, and in the second, the good will hold the bad in check and will not al­low madmen to advise or speak or sit in the as­sembly. As a result of these excellent condi­tions the democracy would very soon fall into salvery.14

Democracy, indeed, possessed its own slaves. Over a third and possibly half of the population belonged to this or to the resident alien class. Neither of these groups were citizens or possessed the rights of citizens. Still they were a large and dangerous minority, doubly powerful under the Athenian system. Athens was, above all, a maritime empire and as such needed the services of the metics, or resident aliens, for handi­craft, trade, and the fleet. The slaves were needed for all the menial work and for a great part of the work which is now done by the industrial classes. The whole social organization of the Greeks was built on this system, and upon it their prosperity de­pended. At Athens, however, the Old Oligarch saw what he thought was evidence of a gradual deterioration of the old system. The slaves found in the license at Athens and in the Athenians' con­centration on matters of power and wealth an opportunity to make their masters aware of the corporate strength of the slave-classes. The city-state in its lust for empire had enslaved itself, from monetary considerations, to its slaves and resident aliens. To

14 Ibid., I, 9; Trans. in Brooks, 11-12.
the horror of the upper class, the slaves, like their masters, prospered. In dress and appearance they became no different from the citizens. No longer could a citizen chastise a slave. Rarely did the slave yield the walk to the citizen.\textsuperscript{15} With all this the people of Athens were content, reasonably so from their viewpoint. They had struck a bargain with the spirits of Wealth and Empire.

Led by the same spirit the people were inclined to repress anything that they themselves could not participate in or gain some benefit to themselves. They were hostile to gymnastics and music as arts beyond their capacity, or in which they found no personal advantage. But yet they were outspoken in their demands for dramatic choruses and athletic training and the equipment of triremes, because:

they realise that it is the rich who furnish choruses and the people who are furnished with them, and the rich who undertake athletic training and triremes and the people who have them undertaken for them. At the same time the people claim to receive pay for their services as singers, runners, dancers, and on board ship, in order that they themselves may gain, and the rich may become poorer.\textsuperscript{16}

Ever in pursuit of wealth the democracy has made its allies the slaves of the Athenian people.\textsuperscript{17} This they have accomplished by upholding the bad (or democratic) cause in all the subject-cit-

\textsuperscript{15} De Republica Ath., I, 10
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., I, 13; trans. in Brooks, 13-14.
\textsuperscript{17} De Republica Ath., I, 18
They deprive the good of their civic rights and property, and get them exiled, and put them to death, and they help on the bad,"¹⁸ expecting, and wisely so, that the latter will be friends of the central democracy. The Athenians have conceived a very safe plan for the treatment of their allies. Foolishly, so it seems, they do not allow them to prosper and then demand higher tribute, but each Athenian pockets all he can, leaving them only enough to live and work from, and so he is unable to plot against the democracy.¹⁹ And they force the allies to sail to Athens for the settlement of lawsuits, a procedure which is as safe as it is lucrative for all concerned. The poor receive the benefit of all the court fees. The Athenians have the allies at their beck and call without leaving home. They uphold in their own courts the friends of democracy and destroy their enemies more safely than they would if justice were administered in the several communities. The in-coming litigant is subject to a one per cent tax; he must pay for his lodging and food, and have a slave and a carriage. All this is in the people's pockets. In Athens the allies learn who their master is,—not the generals nor the ambassadors whom they have seen at home, not the law, not the Athenian constitution, but ὁ ἄνθρωπός ἄνθρωπός, the humble citizen of Athens.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid., I, 14.
¹⁹ Ibid., I, 15.
²⁰ Ibid., I, 17, 18.
The conveniences of democracy are many. The people find it very advantageous in caring only for themselves. The state provides them with all the public services that the rich must provide for themselves at their own expense,—feasts and festivals, gymnasia, dressing-rooms, and baths.21 Again the Demos lives in great tranquillity at Athens, because it owns nothing outside the walls, depending upon maritime trade and the protection of the fleet. The people, in addition, are blessed with their anonymity. An oligarchical state must keep its word and remain faithful to alliances and oaths. Else guilt attaches itself to the name of the oligarchs who contracted the treaty. But the people can always repudiate agreements, attributing the responsibility for them to an individual speaker or ambassador. No such agreement, should it prove unprofitable or disagreeable, is ever valid until it is given its approval by the people in full assembly. Always, if things go badly, the people blame their leaders, and, if well, they take all the credit to themselves.22 They are well content to lop off individual heads, to have them ridiculed and abused; in this way they rid themselves of those who would advance themselves above the people. As in everything, so here the people are very wise; it is only natural that the Demos should be democratic.23

21 Ibid., II, 9
22 Ibid., II, 7
23 Ibid., II, 18, 19
Democracy is reproached by some, writes the Old Oligarch, for a fault that it could not correct even if it wanted to do so. The fault lies in the system. Democracy is slow. Man or measure can stand a year before the Council or the Assembly before being heard. This situation is not at all unusual. It is forced upon Athens by the enormous amount of public business. The Council or the Assembly had to give decision "upon more lawsuits, prosecutions, and audits than the rest of mankind put together." Deliberations upon war; provision of revenue; enacting of laws; the daily welfare of the city; the allies; supervision of dockyards and sacred buildings; the fitting of triremes; the choregi for the Dionysia, Thareylia, Panathenaeae, Prometheia, and Hephaestia; the appointment of the four hundred trierarchs; the satisfaction of all litigants at home and from abroad; the testing and approval of citizens; questions of military service, of punishment for crime and impiety; assessments of tribute; the whole complicated system of home and foreign relations,—these were the concern of the people of Athens, a task which engaged large numbers of the populace in rotation. It was a leisure-loving populace, too. They were the people who held twice as many festivals as any other state in Greece. During these periods the city's business came to a standstill. Little wonder that democracy was slow and that guilt found immunity in its surroundings.25

24 Ibid., III, 2; trans. in Brooks, 24.
Nevertheless, these matters cannot be changed. Every device that betters the Constitution takes away something from the democracy, and this the people will not tolerate. Unimportant changes, adding or taking away here or there, they will permit, but the democracy they will not change, and the democracy will always espouse the evil course if it is suited to itself. So greatly do the people fear enslavement. Their numbers would be few and doomed to failure, for "how could anyone suppose that the majority would have suffered unjustly at Athens, where it is the people who hold the official posts." 

The Old Oligarch has been caught on the horns of his own dilemma. His dislike of democracy is born of his total lack of sympathy for the mob. He feels no confidence in it. He cannot understand its ways nor appreciate its values. Yet he sees with his own clear eyes the same brilliant city that Thucydides was to write of in a few years. He lived through a Golden Age, too, and experienced all the advantages of the Imperial City. He lived under Pericles, and called what he saw democracy,--wanton democracy, selfish, ignoble, unjust, and ignorant. Thucydides lived under Pericles, and called what he saw "nominally a democracy",--just the opposite of what the Old Oligarch saw--, yet a democracy that made the whole city of Athens the school of Greek culture, 

26 Ibid., III, 8, 9, 10.
Thucydides saw the glorious ideal and praised it; the Old Oligarch did not see the ideal, could not understand it, but he saw the facts; he saw the great city and grimly admired that reality.

28 Thucydides, II, 41.
CHAPTER FOUR
AN EDUCATOR AND PAMPHLETEER ON ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY

The political views of Isocrates were the product of his times. The great day of democracy was already past. Before Isocrates was five years old, the Peloponnesian War had begun. This was in 431. When Pericles died in 429, Isocrates was only seven. The news of the disastrous death of the Sicilian Expedition came to him as a man of twenty-three. Two years later he saw the Four Hundred established and received his first taste of oligarchy. The next year, 410, the democracy was fully restored. Six years went by, and, when he was thirty-three, the long walls were pulled down, and the Thirty Tyrants began their reign of terror. And again the next year, in 403, the democracy was revived. At thirty-seven he saw how Socrates died, and, when he was fifty, Plato was teaching in the Academy. In 380 the Panegyric was written by a man of fifty-six, four years after the birth of Demosthenes and Aristotle. By the time Isocrates reached three score and ten Aristotle had arrived in Athens. In his eighties the old teacher watched the rise of Philip and heard the eloquent Philippics of the Orator of Athens. He was one year short of ninety when Plato died in 347. He could have seen the beginning of a new age when at

\[1\] Isocrates, Areopagiticus, 14.
ninety-five he learned of Aristotle and the boy Alexander at the court of Philip. Three years later, in 338, came Chaeronea, when Isocrates was ninety-eight, the year he died. Had he lived two more years, he would have seen Alexander reign, and, two years later, Aristotle teaching in the Lyceum.

From Pericles to Alexander was the life-span of this old, old man. The years he lived, the decades they covered, the inevitable changes in men and manners that they brought, tell better than any words the reason behind Isocrates' views on democracy. In the year 346, when he was already ninety, he devoted his Areopagiticus to an advocacy of the "Ancestral Democracy". How he came to be of this mind is told by the story of his years. What that mind was, is pointedly explained by Barker.

To Isocrates the age of Solon represents the ideal past to which Athens ought to return. Isocrates professes to be a democrat, but he desires a tempered democracy, 'like that of Sparta', in which office falls to the most competent and liberty is not interpreted as license.²

Most of what Isocrates had to say about democracy he said about the years 355-346 B.C. These years marked the finish of the degrading Social War, which ended in the defeat of Athens and left her much weakened. In these years Philip of Macedon took Amphipolis, Pydna, and Potidæa, and with his conquests there came the

² Barker, 102.
certainty that Hellenic politics would receive a new character unless strong steps were taken to stop the disintegration of Athenian public spirit. At this critical time Isocrates wrote two discourses or political pamphlets, On the Peace, and the Areopagiticus.

Isocrates, with his lofty attachment to ideals, thought that he, a man who had never held public office, might be the man whose pleas, clearly disinterested, could check the course of self-destruction that the Athenian state had chosen. He was well aware of the dangers that reformers ran. For this reason he strove to ward off in advance the criticism he knew he would meet. He wanted it remembered by all that he was not an enemy of the people and that he had always condemned oligarchy and special privileges. The people should understand that, although he found serious fault with the present democracy, he urged the appointment of no special committee or commission to consider the question. Every Athenian realized the danger of that course because this was the means to do away with the democracy that was used before. He merely wished to assume the position of a neutral adviser and to urge them not to forget the heritage of their fathers, which, in contrast to the present ills and the future perils, had brought numberless blessings upon Athens. The proof of the integrity of his intentions, he asserts, lies in the fact that the government which he wants restored to Athens was established by men who were acknowledged everywhere to have been the "best friends of the people", 
How could anyone believe that he, an Athenian, who had seen the toll of those terrible months with his own eyes, could desire a return of the rule of the Thirty Tyrants and of the reign of terror, when a Spartan garrison had occupied the Acropolis. The shame of this event was indelibly printed on all his thoughts and made the oligarchy an ever hateful refuge.

No government, he held, even the most wanton democracy, could exceed the depravity of an oligarchy. Nevertheless a comparing of the oligarchy they were rid of and of the democracy they enjoyed should not leave the Athenians complacent. Their present state, as he saw it, was a far cry from the noble polity of their forefathers. The fortunes of Athens were on an immeasurably lower level than they had ever been before democracy had been corrupted.

Along such lines did Isocrates make his plea. With true fourth century vigor he pictured the degeneracy of the democracy of the day and contrasted it with the Golden Age of the past. Much of his criticism we have heard before and shall hear again in Plato. Make allowance as we may for overdrawing the picture, the general agreement upon certain undesirable features of democracy that seem to have manifested themselves consistently leaves little room for doubting that much abuse really existed, and not in a

---

3 Isocrates, Areopagiticus, 16
4 For whole paragraph cf. Isocrates, Areopagiticus, 61-73
small or inoffensive degree. George Norlin in his *Introduction* to the *Areopagiticas* observes that Isocrates attributed the weakness of Athens mainly to an excess of "freedom" and makes his own comment that, "in the fourth century, the Athenians were living more and more their own lives, selfishly pursuing their own business or living off the state rather than for it, and craving increasingly the liberty to 'do as they liked'."\(^5\)

The specific charges Isocrates makes bear out this view. He reminds the Athenians that they drive all orators from the platform except those who support their own desires.\(^6\) This corrupt procedure has gone so far that the orators actually practise and study how to make their discourses pleasing to the Athenians, disregarding what will be advantageous to the state.\(^7\) Isocrates condemns the Athenians more seriously for allowing to appear on the platform before them men whose private morals left much to be desired, men such as Eubulus, Callistratus (cf. Athenaeus, i4,166e), and Philocrates (cf. Aeschines, *On the Embassy*, 52). They listen to drunks\(^8\) like the demagogue Cleophon, and to men like Eubulus, who instituted the public dole, setting aside a portion of the public revenues as a "theoric" fund to be distributed to the

---

6 *Isocrates*, *Peace*, 3
7 Ibid., 5
8 Aristotle, 34
people at public festivals, rather than to public-spirited men of character. δημοκρατίας οὖσας οὐκ ἐστὶ ταρασσία. "Though this is a democracy, there is no freedom of speech." 9

Isocrates feared the democracy was living on its name. It trusted in a reputation for equality with equity. But democracy had been betrayed and now educated its citizens to feel that "insolence was democracy, transgression of the law was liberty, that license of the tongue was equality, and liberty to do anything at all was happiness." ἔπαιδευε τοὺς πολίτας ὡς ήρετοι, τὴν μὲν ἀνολασίαν δημοκρατίαν, τὴν δὲ παρανομίαν ἐλευθερίαν, τὴν δὲ παρενομίαν ἴσονομίαν, τὴν δὲ οὐσίαν τοῦ πάντα προεῖν ἐυθαμονίαν. 10

Isocrates proposed a simple remedy,—the restoration of the democracy instituted by Solon and re-established by Cleisthenes. ὅσος όντως εὔροιμεν οὔτε δημοτικτερόν οὔτε τὴν πόλεως μᾶλλον συμφέρουσαν. 11 "A government than which we could find none more democratic or more advantageous to the city." History gives the lie to Isocrates' statement here. It was mentioned in the chapter on Solon—and there is ample proof for it in Aristotle's Constitution of Athens—that Solon did not establish a democracy, nor could the polity as long as he guided

9 For whole paragraph cf. Isocrates, Peace, 13, 14.
10 Isocrates, Areopagiticus, 20.
11 Ibid., 17.
it be called democratic. As the work stood when Solon left it, democracy had been instituted only in the judicial sphere. "He gave the people not so much the control of public policy, as the certainty of being governed legally in accordance with known rules."\(^\text{12}\) In other respects Solon believed firmly in the rule of law and in holding the people in close restraint. So that, in effect, Solon's actual government was an aristocracy which ruled constitutionally.

Isocrates, of course, was perfectly well aware of this fact, and such a constitution met his desires exactly. He gives complete approbation to the "ancestral democracy", picturing it for what it was, a constitutional aristocracy.

Our forefathers had resolved that the people, as the supreme master of the state, should appoint the magistrates, call to account those who failed in their duty, and judge in cases of dispute; while those citizens who could afford the time and possessed sufficient means should devote themselves to the care of the commonwealth, as servants of the people, entitled to receive commendation if they proved faithful to their trust, and contenting themselves with this honor, but, condemned, on the other hand, if they governed badly, to meet with no mercy, but to suffer the severest punishment.\(^\text{13}\)

Aristotle confirms the fact that this was Solonian practice, namely, for the people to select their own magistrates and have the power to call them to account for their conduct, though, as Isocrates recommends, the selection was to be from "men of reputation

\(^{12}\) Barker, 44.

\(^{13}\) Isocrates, Areopagiticus, 26, 27; trans. in Norlin, 119-121.
Isocrates, then, was a vigorous critic of pure democracy. His faith in the lot, supposedly the feature most characteristic of the democracy of Athens, was notoriously slender. The old democracy, he said, recognized two kinds of equality: that which made the same award to all alike, where the lot was leader of all distinctions: and that which gave to each man his due, on the basis of merit. Further he held that the ancient democracy had chosen the latter, rejecting, and rightly so he thought, the principle that the good and the bad are worthy of the same honor. It was the principle of their forefathers, and his as well, that the best and ablest should be selected for each function of the state. In short, he defined the democratic man as the man who did, not what the people liked, but what was for their good. He wanted to leave the people only that measure of sovereignty which would enable them to protect their constitution and through it their rights. Exclusive of this safeguard he was willing to change the definition of democracy from Rule of the People to Love of the People.

14 Aristotle, Politics, 1274, a, 15ff.
15 Isocrates, Areopagiticus, 21, 22.
CHAPTER FIVE

PLATO--THE EVOLUTION OF A CRITIC

The most severe and uncompromising of all the critics of democracy at Athens was Plato. Critics and friends alike of Plato have outdone themselves in endeavors to understand or to discredit his position, and there is no doubt that the facts and conditions of his life let open to them a fertile source of speculation. Like Isocrates, Plato knew democracy only when its best day was past. Likewise Plato lived a long life,—full eighty years, long enough to lose something of the idealism of earlier years. By birth he belonged to an ancient and distinguished family of Athens. His mother was a kinswoman of Critias; the latter was "prominent among the oligarchical clique of 404,"¹ and was a philosopher of sorts, a man of letters, and one of the Thirty. Plato's is one of the greatest names in philosophy; his philosophy dominated both Pagan and Christian thinking for centuries. He was the first to appraise democracy on a philosophical basis, and he brought to his task all his original thinking, his philosopher's esteem of knowledge, an aristocrat's fear of the mob, and an idealist's disdain of the second best. Remember, too, that Plato had been attached to Socrates with great personal devotion. Plato was, indeed, "the man who felt the inspiration of his character most

¹ Barker, 109.
deeply and reacted upon it most powerfully."

Each of the above considerations has an important bearing on Plato's view of democracy. Their importance will be clearer when Plato's own words are examined. But in anticipation of this step, let us see what relations there may be between Plato's democratic views and his life, character, and work. First the influence of Socrates.

The death of Socrates, which happened when Plato was between twenty-five and thirty years of age, was the turning point in his life. Tradition says that immediately after the carrying out of the sentence in the manner described in the Phaedo, Plato left Athens. All his views of public life and of his own career were changed.

Socrates' death at the hands of the democracy was a shock from which Plato never fully recovered. Recall the words that Plato put into the mouth of his master: "No man in the world can preserve his life if he honestly opposes himself to you or to any other people and attempts to prevent many unjust and lawless things from being done by the state." Many years later, when Plato was an old man of eighty, he still recurs to the memory of his murdered master.

...if anyone is found to be investigating the art of pilotage or navigation or the subject of health and true medical doctrine about winds and things hot and cold or, less sinuously, any point of knowledge, contrary to the written rules, or to be indulging

---

2 James, 289.
3 Ibid., 292-3.
4 Plato, Apology, 31e.
in any speculation whatsoever on matter, he shall not be called a physician or a ship captain but a star-gazer, a kind of loquacious sophist, and secondly anyone who is properly qualified may bring an accusation against him and hale him into court for corrupting the young, and persuading them to attack the arts of navigation and medicine in opposition to the laws and to govern the ships and the sick according to their own will.

The influence of Socrates' death by the hands of the demos must have had an almost incalculable effect upon Plato. Those who discredit his views on democracy have some basis in fact for their attitude. Some bias there must have been.

There is, too, considerable significance in the fact that Plato approached democracy as a philosopher. Some writers readily understand Plato's aversion to the rule of the people. They hold that as a philosopher he was

...far too sound a political thinker ever to countenance democracy in any form. By the time of Plato's maturity, the utter failure of democracy in its most brilliant and promising embodiment, the Athenian republic, was so evident that henceforth no serious philosopher could do other than condemn it.

Plato's cast of thought leads him to say:

All existing states are hopelessly corrupt; the good man, unable to combat and unwilling to share the iniquities of practical politics, can only take refuge from the storm in the shelter of a

---

5 Cf. Plato, Apology, 18b, 19b.
7 Rose, Greek Literature, 260, text and note.
wall, and the only hope for the salvation of society is that philosophers should become rulers or rulers philosophers.\(^8\)

The remembrance that Plato was the ablest thinker of his day and, an Athenian of the Athenians, the recollection that with all his literary and artistic genius he should have been, by all the usual standards, better prepared to estimate the magnitude of Athenian achievement under the democracy, and the knowledge that his writings have made him for us the living, breathing spirit of Greece, puts emphasis to a serious question raised in the minds of everyone whoestimates Plato's greatness truly. How could he have been so blind to the virtues of democracy? Could it be that he was not blind, that he gave us a true picture of democracy in Athens? If so, his views cannot be lightly dismissed.

Plato, we have said, was, especially in his younger and middle years, an idealist in politics. He had conceived an ideal state, of which he gives us a full explanation in his literary masterpiece, the Republic. How much Plato's noble ideal may have affected his views of practical politics is hinted at in Barker's Greek Political Theory.

It has been suggested that the main-spring of the Republic is Plato's aversion to contemporary capitalism, and his desire to substitute a new scheme of socialism. This would make of the Republic an economic treatise; and the author of the suggestion enforces his point

\[^8\] Paul Shorey, What Plato Said, 6; cf. Plato, Republic, 496c-e, 592a; cf. also Laws, 660c, Republic, 473c-d.
by attempting to show that in contemporary Greece the struggle between oligarchy and democracy represented a struggle of capital and labor, and that in Plato we find a vivid sense of the evils of this struggle and an attempt to deal with those evils by means of socialistic remedies.9

The extent to which such tendencies, supposed or otherwise, have led many writers to discount the criticisms of democracy voiced by Plato is shown by the following lines. The author has been endeavoring to demonstrate why the impression has become common that Athens was aristocratic in the Age of Pericles. One of his points is the following:

Modern writers have the tendency implicitly to follow Plato and Aristotle as authorities and imagine that actual fifth century Athenian conditions are accurately reflected in the pages of these philosophers even when the latter are discussing theoretical polities and imaginary and ideal societies. Caution must always be observed surely in the case of these 'Laconizing' theorizers who, furthermore, were intense aristocrats and distrusted democracy.10

Something further in the same strain is expressed by Livingstone.

All the political thinkers of Greece, with the exception of Plato, speak of the state as existing for the individual. Plato is not typically Greek. If Hellenism had been a persecuting religion, it would have been bound to send him to the stake.11

9 Barker, 146.
11 Ibid., 479; quoted from Livingstone, The Greek Genius.
The general conclusion, then, is, it seems, that the ideal conceptions of Plato do reflect literally the actual Athenian conditions nor are they representative of fifth century popular belief. But here again a note of caution should be added,—it is difficult to ignore, as the writers quoted would have us do, the views of a thinker as profound as Plato.

A more human view of the origin of Plato's "bias" against democracy is expressed in the opinion that he could forget neither his ancestry nor his position in Athenian society. He was a Eupatrid, and his mother was connected by blood with the oligarch Critias. The position of this class might be described in the following manner. The whole organization of the State's religious life belonged, by tradition, in the hands of the aristocracy. These were matters for a man of birth and education. Closely connected with religious usage, there was the idea of justice, as much a matter of technical and traditional knowledge as the religious law, and not to be administered, so it would seem in the earlier times of the city, except by those to whom divine order had entrusted that knowledge. All this is reasonable, as experience proves. In the primitive stages of any state, the common people are in no position to regulate the religious and judicial function of the state. No more, indeed, are they capable of guiding the state in military matters.

The Aristocracy took the greater risk in actual warfare, and were at greater expense than the
commons in providing themselves with horses and superior arms. They...had a greater stake in the State and they bore the greater burden. What wonder, then, if they...came to look down on the people as louts who could not and would not fight, unworthy alike of honor on the battlefield, and of power in the constitution.12

Modern commentators on Plato feel that he, as an inheritor of this tradition, could not escape its effects on his own philosophy of the state, and they attribute his disaffection for the sovereignty of the people to this cause. It is a simple solution of the question, but not one that quiets serious doubts that others have raised. Barker maintains that "it would be a mistake to judge the politics of Plato's family from the career of Critias, or to maintain that Plato inherited from his family a prejudice against Athenian democracy."13 Grundy defends Plato's position with an acute analysis of the whole picture.

Idealist historians have represented the Athenian democracy as an ideal constitution where-in the selfishness inherent in human nature was reduced to a minimum, and the good of the individual was merged in the good of the community. If this view be accepted, it must be assumed that the upper and wealthier classes in Greek democracies, and above all in Athens, were uniformly and singularly bad, for they hated this ideal constitution with a hatred that was singularly whole-hearted. The intensity of the feeling between oligarch and democrat all the Greek world over was such that party patriotism held in men's esteem a place above all devotion to the state...Those who would account for the intensity of this feeling by differences in theoretical politics assign to it a cause which is obviously inadequate.

12 Fowler, 118.
13 Barker, 109.
Men do not die for political theories, unless these theories embody some practical principle which makes a material difference in the life which they live.  

The argument drawn from Plato's years is a double-edged sword. His critics wield it against him, contending that Plato lived so long that the Athens he knew had lost the gifted and animated spirit of the Golden Age and had suffered sadly at the hands of war and pestilence. In their opinion: "It is unscientific to judge of the working of Athenian institutions in the fifth century B.C. by the opinions of men who knew them only as worked by a degenerate population in the fourth." Admirers of Plato who desire also to be friends of democracy use the length of his days to their own satisfaction and consolation. Plato's eighty years were long enough, since he was fertile and productive to the end, to provide two distinct periods in his political thought,—the period of the Gorgias and the Republic and the period of the Politicus and the Laws. In these latter Plato, we shall see, seemed to adopt a more tolerant attitude to the democracy of Athens. The passing of many years had perhaps made the restless torrent of his impetuous idealism run slower, more content to hold itself within the more comfortable channel of practicality. Or their passing had dimmed the memory of the stain which Athenian democracy had to bear forever in the midst of many proud boasts and glorious deeds,—the murder of Plato's beloved master, Socrates.

15 Fowler, 153-4.
It is never easy to know which is Socrates' thought and which is Plato's own. Socrates left no writings of his own. We know him chiefly through the influence of his mind on Plato's. (Xenophon, too, was Socrates' disciple and has left loving and reverent accounts of him.) Still, it is possible to some degree to estimate Socrates' contribution to Plato's political thought. Barker, after reviewing with thoroughness Plato's political theories, summarizes Socrates' contribution to them.

Socrates had criticised the characteristics of Athenian democracy—the use of the lot; the composition of the assembly; the ignorance of the Athenian statesmen. He had preached that the handling of politics required some esoteric mystery of knowledge; and such preaching in a democratic State was at the best incivisme, and at the worst lèse-majesté.16

The political implications contained in this doctrine are apparent. Such teaching reached its logical fulfilment in the theories of Plato.

Socrates held that politics not only required knowledge, but also unselfish devotion...[The latter] is a conception which no advocate of the democratic cause could do otherwise than endorse. But Socrates had preached the sovereignty of knowledge, and the doctrine of the sovereignty of knowledge might easily become, in its political application, a doctrine of enlightened despotism. This, indeed, is what it became, at any rate for a time and during the middle period of his life, in the hands of Plato. Such a theory of enlightened despotism was necessarily inimical to democracy; it might also become

16 Barker, 94.
17 Ibid., 96-7.
inimical to the rule of law. Monarchical, and even absolutist, philosophies might thus draw their inspiration from Socrates; and in that sense he was the enemy of democracy.  

There was a fate in Athens for enemies of democracy. "No man in world can preserve his life if honestly opposes himself to you."  

17 Ibid., 96-7.  
18 Plato, Apology, 31e.
Plato and Isocrates lived and wrote side by side as heads of rival schools in fourth century Athens. Their years of productive writing and thinking coincided for forty or fifty years. In what they said and what they thought about democracy there are, of course, resemblances. Both were extremely critical of fourth century democracy. Both had harsh things to say about the relaxing

1 Plato, Republic, VIII, 563c, 7.
2 Ibid., 560e.
in morals and the lowering of civic spirit that was apparent in their Athens. Isocrates, however, was no enemy of democracy. He merely deplored the new, radical system into which the ancient democracy had degenerated, while he reserved only the highest praise for the state of Solon, Cleisthenes, and Pericles, extolling the polity of his ancestors and even of his own boyhood as the ideal past to which Athens ought to return. The democracy that Isocrates satirized was the democracy of the demagogues who followed Pericles and of the unsettled state of the fourth century.

Plato is a more thorough-going enemy of democracy. The state he attacks is fifth century Athens. The shocking things he says about democracy concern the Athens of Pericles and of Themistocles. The very days of democracy's greatest accomplishments are the days that Plato deprecates. The best that democracy had to offer was not good enough for Plato,—not in these early years when Plato was forty and Socrates dead little more than a decade. This was the period, about 387, that Plato chose to make final his separation from the political world and give his devotion thenceforward to philosophy. The Gorgias, which was written at this time, is his "Apology", vindicating his own choice. Lamb in his Introduction to the Gorgias is of the opinion that "this explains the peculiar severity of his attitude and language towards statesmen of the past and present."³

Plato's charges against Themistocles and Pericles and other Athenian statesmen are based on a principle that is typically his own. According to it he defines what the good statesman ought to accomplish for his country, namely, to make his fellow-citizens as good as possible. And if a man is a good statesman, he will be constantly changing his fellow-citizens from worse to better. Applying this principle to Pericles' career, Plato holds that, if Pericles is to pass inspection on this point, the Athenians would have to be found better at the end of Pericles' career than they were when he first began to speak before the people. Plato then asks whether the Athenians are said to have become better because of Pericles, or, on the contrary, to have been corrupted by him.

"I, for my part, hear this, that Pericles has made the Athenians idle and cowardly and loquacious and greedy, by starting the system of public fees." 

The seriousness of this indictment cannot be exaggerated. This is not fourth century Athens. This is Athens in her glory. These are the same Athenians of whom Thucydides said: "Their bodies they devote to their country as though they belonged to other men: their true self is their mind, which is most truly their own when employed in her

4 Plato, Gorgias, 516e.
service."5

Two men looked at the same reality; one saw it as it was; the other saw it in perspective, from the vantage point of forty past years. Whose testimony should be accepted? The philosopher's or the historian's?

A very recent work of William Kelly Prentice, The Ancient Greeks, accepts Plato's verdict without question. I shall quote one passage in full merely to show that it is not at all unusual for careful students of Greek antiquities to agree unreservedly with Plato's condemnation of Athenian institutions, despite the constant tradition that has painted, and will ever picture, the Athenian democracy as an ideal state and a model for all others. To decide that question would require a full and comparative study of the Athenian with the later democratic institutions and of the Athenian state with the other successful states of the past and present. Here the question is left entirely open, though Plato's case is presented by Prentice in an extremely favorable light.

Socrates' question to Callicles6 implies that Plato thought the Athenian voters had been corrupted by Pericles, who had made them lazy, cowardly, disputatious, and greedy for the money paid to them by the government. Under Pericles the state came to exist chiefly to support the demos.7

It is possible that Pericles, like others,

5 Thucydides, Funeral Oration, ii, 35-46.
6 Plato, Gorgias, 515e.
7 Aristotle, Politics, 1293a.
believed that such measures were wise and proper, that he really desired to help the common man and to improve the condition of the poor. He may have believed that his policies were for the best interests of his country. It is possible, however, that he was concerned most of all in acquiring and maintaining political power for himself. It cannot be imagined that Pericles failed to realize the dangers of the legislation which he advocated. Doubtless he thought that by the force of his personality and by his eloquence he could continue to dominate the people and prevent a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Thucydides the historian, who admired him exceedingly believed that, if he had lived, Athens would have won the war against Sparta and the Peloponnesian League, and that under his guidance Athens enjoyed the best government in all its history... But when Pericles died Athens fell under the control of reckless and often unprincipled demagogues such as Cleon, Hyperbolus and Cleophon, yielded to the worst influences and made the most mistakes. Step by step the Athenians were induced by their desire of liberty, equal privileges, and a more abundant life--for themselves, of course, not for all mankind or even for all the inhabitants of their country--to deliver themselves into the hands of professional politicians and demagogues, and thus to accomplish their own ruin. For absolute democracy is as vicious as absolute monarchy or absolute oligarchy. And the complete triumph of democracy at Athens in the fifth century before Christ meant the unrestrained power of the largest class of voters, the most thoughtless, the most bigoted, and the most irresponsible.

It was not so much the growth of democratic principles, as the ambition of politicians and the greed of the common man, which produced the extreme democracy of ancient Athens. The earliest changes in the Athenian constitution had their origin in revolt against the exploitation of the underprivileged many by the overprivileged few; but most of the constitutional changes and much of the legislation of the fifth century were effected by political methods very like those familiar in our own time. To obtain power for themselves, or to maintain it, the Athenian politicians resorted to a progressive corruption of the electorate, and thereby led their people down 'the road to glory',
then to destruction.  

Plato blames Pericles in principle for this gradual deterioration of the demos. This attitude of the philosopher is based with shrewdness and practicality on the undeniable fact that Pericles was responsible for introducing the practice whereby the dicasts or jurors received payment from the state for their services. The Constitution of Athens by Aristotle says that more than 20,000 men were receiving state pay as jurymen and members of the council or being maintained at the public expense as public servants or benefactors. This high figure means that one out of every four, or even one out of every three citizens were engaged and received wages as public civil servants.  

Zimmern, an authority on the Greek politics and economics of the fifth century, is not in agreement with Plato's condemnation of this practice.

Regular pay for state work, such as Pericles instituted for jurymen and councillors, is not 'corruption' but a great advance. 'The labourer is worthy of his hire!' and Athenians were sensible enough not to be ashamed of receiving it. The effect of its introduction was not so much to tempt poor men into public life [The Old Oligarch, Isocrates, and Plato infer the contrary] as to compensate the moderately well-to-do for their time and trouble.

There comes forth, nevertheless, from the pages of Plato an

9 Zimmern, 175.  
10 Ibid., 176, note.
Athenian different from the idealized citizen of Thucydides. The citizen Plato saw was not the kind to devote his body to his country as though it belonged to another man. Quite altered, too, is the portrait of the Imperial City to which "all the products of the earth flow in."\(^{11}\) where live "the lovers of beauty",\(^{12}\) with their "many relaxations from toil",\(^{13}\) and their homes "fitted out with good taste and elegance".\(^{14}\) All Plato saw was a "wound festering under the scar", -- ἔμπτευσις.

And'tis said they have made the city great; but they do not perceive that this greatness is but the swelling of a wound festering under the scar, caused by those men of a former time. For without temperance and justice they have stuffed the city with harbors and arsenals and walls and tribute and suchlike foolery.\(^{15}\) Plato then says that when the crash comes, as come it must to a state laid on feeble foundations, the people will blame the counselors who are ruling them and who are merely reaping the evil fruits of other men's mistakes. And Themistocles and Cimon and Pericles, the causes of all these evils, will go unblamed.\(^{16}\) Plato does not side-step. He lashes out fearlessly. It may be that he is rather rigorous in his view; yet there is an element of truth in his charges. Pericles did go far toward teaching the people to live off the state, instead of depending on their own

---

11 Thucydides, II, 38.
12 Ibid., 40.
13 Ibid., 38.
14 Ibid., 38.
15 Plato, Gorgias, 518e, 519a.
16 Ibid., 519a.
industry, and it is true that Pericles' course may have been determined by the necessities of his political position. It was the panem et circenses of a later age, and of every political system wherein the people have begun to feel their power.

But the question of payment admits of another explanation, which shows it to be connected necessarily with a political ideal such as that which he Pericles pursued. Payment for administrative services was clearly a necessity of a true democratic constitution... Since popular government meant personal government on the part of the demos, and such personal government, which implied the political education of the masses, was part of the Periclean ideal, to secure services from the poorer citizens some compensation for the loss of time was necessary, and the numerical equality which democracy demands would have been a mere fiction had not these services been secured by pay.17

Still and all, Plato has scored a point. Whether Pericles willed it or not, and whether he knew it or not that the innovation was dangerous, and thought that by his personal influence, as in so many other things, he could keep the tendency for more and more payment to the people from becoming exaggerated, this reform became the chief change connected with his name. The abuses that occurred later on in Athenian history as the result of this system naturally opened the persons of its promoters, and especially of its inaugurator, to the charge that they and he had resorted to mere bribery in order to establish their own influence. It struck

Plato that there was some absurdity involved in the idea of a whole people paying itself for attendance on public business.

The criticism of democracy found in the Gorgias is bitterly destructive. In the Republic, which was possibly written seven to ten years after the Gorgias, Plato's views have reached a fuller maturity, and, while no less condemnatory, his words are more constructive. By that period he had constructed a definite basis on which to defend his anti-democratic attitude. Building upward from this foundation he formulated a new plan for an idealized society, rejecting as he built every part of life, institution, and law that fell away from his ideal. One such was the democracy of Athens. Plato's ideal was a static society of fixed functional groupings, based on what has been called "the principle of specific function". This ideal made Plato an enemy of Democracy. His mind sought directly after certainty and was irritated by the ever-changing political opinions of the Athenian assembly and its leaders.

It is impossible, in Plato's view, to speak of any single or agreed rule of life in democracy. It contravenes entirely his fundamental conception of the State as a social type to which every member must be trained to conform by a process of education.

19 Barker, 256.
20 Ibid., 255.
The democratic system, in Plato's view, because it ignored the principle of function, was afflicted with two serious flaws. These were ignorance and instability. Ignorance, in fact, was the especial curse of democracy. Plato saw nothing but folly in democracy's failure to use to the full man's natural aristocracy of talent. In democracy the professionless statesman had no place. It was government by amateurs, government of shifting opinions and of no permanent values nor of steady policy.

In Athens especially democracy seemed only to mean the right divine of the ignorant to govern wrong. Any man might speak in the Assembly and help sway its decisions: Any man, whatever his capacity, might be appointed to executive office by the chance of the lot.21

Plato's political thought at this period was rooted in the principle that knowledge was the basis of government. How far he comes from admitting the principle of consent that has filled the thoughts of modern political writers and has become the test of juridically established government in modern times is clearly seen in his thinly veiled contempt for the democratic man who bounces up in the assembly and says whatever comes into his head.22 The man might be a smith, a shoemaker, a merchant, a sea-captain, a rich man, a poor man, well-born or base. It mattered not. Such was each man's right and by this formula did democracy thrive.

21 Ibid., 149.
22 Plato, Republic, 561d.
The Athenian felt only exaltation in the nobility of the ideal and
lauded it as his own discovery and glory.

Under the incentive of our constitution each of
us can present himself to the community adequate,
in his own resources, at one and the same time,
for many activities, and that with a versatile
capacity, and without failing in the graces.\textsuperscript{23}

Yet this system won no admiration from Plato; the very ideal he
considered downright unjust.

Justice meant, in his eyes, that a man should do
his work in the station of life to which he was
called by his capacities. Everything has its
function. An axe which is used to carve a tree
as well as to cut it down, is an axe misused;\textsuperscript{24}
and a man who attempts to govern his fellows
when at best he is only fit to be a tolerable
craftsman, is a man not only mistaken, but also
unjust.\textsuperscript{25}

At best, a best that Plato was unwilling to admit in the
Republic, the democratic state could only hope to strike a medi-
ocre average between virtue and vice. Too slow, too shifty to be
strong, it was too weak to be vicious. But the virtue of medioc-
crity was not enough for Plato. He had his own grand ideal of
the philosopher king. In his young idealism, he could not con-
ceive of admitting a second or a third best, of letting better
men be shoved aside merely to capture some elusive liberties,
liberties that often enough were snares of evil that entrapped and
then corrupted the men who ran fastest toward them. Democracy

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 561d.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 353a.
\textsuperscript{25} Barker, 149; cf. Plato, Republic, Bk. I, entire.
sought its good. Plato looked only for THE GOOD. His Statesman was a physician who did the best he could for his patient. He did not ask the patient’s consent to this or that treatment. If the patient knew, he would not have engaged a physician. Yet he has, and in a similar manner the subjects of a state have their statesman. Why should he require their consent? Why should the patient be bothered with quacks, bouncing in and out with new treatments? Knowledge would cure the patient; consent would not. Plato’s reasoning is triumphant and it cannot be denied. But where to find such a physician for the state?

Plato himself gave the answer. "There is no such nature anywhere, except in small degree." CALLYIUS, οὐσαμῶν οὐσαμῶς, ἀλλ' ἐν ματα βραγὼν. And even if there were, if a man should fully grasp all the principles necessary to guide the state, should he gain control of the state and become an autocrat, as he must, then:

He would never be able to remain in this view and to persevere in fostering the common welfare of the state, putting his private interests after the public welfare. Instead his mortal nature will always drive him on to grasping and self-interested action.

26 Plato, Laws, 875d.
27 Ibid., 875b.
Thus Plato in the *Laws*, forestalling alien criticism, deposited the philosopher king of his younger and more idealistic years and put in his place on the throne the Rule of Law. Yet he never ceased to affirm that there is none mightier than Knowledge, when it can be found "by some divine grace, -- ἀείδ μοίραν."

ἀπὸ τῆν ὑμῶν γὰρ οὐτε νόμος οὐτε τάξις οὐσει τῷ ἱερῷ. "

Πρέπειν."

Very far from either of these ideals is the rule of the undisciplined *demos*. Unhappy Plato! To approve democracy he would have had not only to remove the very germ and foundation of his political thought but also to forgive. Democracy struck not only at his mind. It had pierced his heart when it had killed Socrates.

28 Ibid., 875c.
29 Ibid., 875c.
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study has been to give a complete review of the discussions concerning Greek democracy as found in the writings of Plato and his predecessors. Aristotle, whose contribution to the theory of politics has been both vast and pertinent, has, of set purpose, been avoided as worthy of separate treatment. Originally it had been part of my plan to make use of the treatise on the Constitution of Athens, a work which has been attributed to Aristotle and is usually published among his works. This booklet gives a reliable and detailed account of the working of the Athenian constitution from its beginning to its maturity and decline. From its pages a description of Athenian democracy at work was to be drawn. The democracy of Athens should also be understood through what it was and did; the people and their leaders should be seen working and producing.

Three things, however, became apparent after a reading of the Aristotelian treatise: First, that there is no adequate substitute for the work itself; secondly, the book is short enough to be read by anyone who cares to supplement mere discussions on the theory of democracy; lastly, the Constitution of Athens has been worked over thoroughly by a large number of authors, since it is the source for the political history of this period. Another review of the same matter would have lacked the zest of
originality and have suffered greatly in the knowledge that it
would certainly not improve on another solid and penetrating study
based on the Constitution of Athens, to be found in Greenidge's
Handbook of Constitutional History, under the chapter Democracy.

Democracy at work can still be viewed impartially by one
who has listened to Plato and his predecessors. Plato's adverse
criticism has, of course, great authority. Yet it is to a great
extent equalized by the steady and proud loyalty shown by Thucy­
dïdes toward Athenian democracy. The Old Oligarch was singularly
unimpressed by democracy and seems to have seen all its blemishes.
Isocrates loved freedom as much as any Athenian but hated its
excess. Nevertheless, an abiding conviction remains that democra­
cy at its glorious best was worth its faults. Let Glover sum up
for us once more what Athenian democracy was and what it did:

It was a government of citizens met in an assem­
bly, where, without Presidents, ministers, am­
bassadors or representatives, they themselves
governed. They created a beautiful city and a
law-abiding people; they united the Greek world
or a large part of it; they defeated the Persian
Empire in all its greatness and drove the Persian
from the sea. They made an atmosphere where gen­
ius could grow, where it could be as happy perhaps
as genius ever can, and where it flowered and bore
the strange fruit that has enriched the world for­
ever. 'Whate'er we know of beauty, half is hers.'
The political temper, and the scientific,—phil­
osophy, sculpture and poetry--Athens gave us them
all in that period, a century or so at longest,
while Democracy flourished.¹

¹ Glover, 73.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


Burnet, J(oannes), Platonis Opera, Oxonii: E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1905.


Freeman, Kathleen), The Work And Life of Solon, with a Translation of His Poems, London, Humphrey Milford, 1926.

Hude, C(arolus), Herodoti Historiae, Oxonii: E Typographo Clarendoniano.


**Secondary Sources**


Fowler, W. W(arde), The City-State of the Greeks And Romans, Lon­
don, Macmillan & Co., 1907.

Gilbert, G(ustav), The Constitutional Antiquities of Sparta And
Athens (translated), London and New York, Macmillan Co.,
1895.


Co., 1927

Glotz, G(ustave), Ancient Greece at Work, New York, Alfred A.
Knopf, 1926.

Glotz, G(ustave), The Greek City And Its Institutions, Alfred A.
Knopf, 1930.

Goome, A.W., Aristophanes And Politics, The Classical Review,

Grant, A(rthur) J., Greece in the Age of Pericles, New York,
Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897.

Greene, William C., The Achievement of Greece, Cambridge, Mass.,
Harvard U., 1923.

Greenidge, A.H.J., A Handbook of Greek Constitutional History,
New York, 1902.

Grote, George, Plato and the Other Companions of Socrates, London,
John Murray, 1885, 4 vols.

Grundy, G.B., Thucydides And the History of His Age, London, John
Murray, 1911.

Hammond, B(asil) E., The Political Institutions of the Ancient

Hasebroek, Johannes, Trade And Politics in Ancient Greece, trans­
lated by L.M. Fraser and D.C. Macgregor, London, G. Bell &
Sons, 1933.

Hill, G.F., Sources for Greek History, Oxford, Clarendon Press,
1907.

Hutton, Maurice, The Greek Point of View, New York, George H Doran
Co.


Whibley, L(eonard), Political Parties in Athens during the Peloponnesian War, Cambridge, University Press, 1889.


Zimmern, Alfred, Solon And Croesus And Other Greek Essays, London, Oxford University Press, 1928.
The thesis submitted by Edmund P. Burke, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Classics.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Date: Sept. 11, 1947

Signature of Adviser: J. J. Doyle, S.J.