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DEMOCRACY

The Greatest Fiction of Them All

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What is Democracy?

- a : **government by the people**; *especially : rule of the majority*
- b : a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them **directly or indirectly** through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary



Democracy and ancient Greece



DEMOCRACY IS A GREEK WORD
COMPOSED OF TWO PARTS:
DEMOS THE PEOPLE
KRATOS RULE
THE RULE OF THE PEOPLE

What was Greek (Athenian) Democracy like?

- It was different from our own
- Women did not have political rights.
- Slavery was acceptable.

Ancient Democracy and Class

- Aristotle *Politics* 1290b: 17-20:
- Democracy is when there is a majority of **free, poor men** who have authority to rule, while oligarchy is when it is in the hands of the **wealthy and well-born, who are a minority.**

Class and modern Democracy

- Class is also an issue in modern “democracies”.
- Consider the problem of the “Eton Brigade” in contemporary British politics.
- Can someone poor become prime-minister?

Democracy... or not?

- Let's see whether Aristotle's definition of ancient Greek democracy works with modern democracies.
- Based on Aristotle *Politics* 1317b: 17-41

The traffic light system

- GREEN = Pretty much the same in ancient and modern
- YELLOW = Looks the same but it's not really
- RED = not the same at all

Ancient vs. Modern

- Making no distinctions according to a citizen's birth, poverty, or occupation
- No public offices held for life.
- Providing pay for all service in government, or for all functions that exercise authority.

What do YOU think?

Ancient vs. Modern

- Making no distinctions according to a citizen's birth, poverty or occupation
- No public offices held
- Providing pay for all s government, or for all that exercise authority



Ancient vs. Modern

Election to all offices from among all the citizens.

- Election for the ancient meant election by **lot**, not by vote.
- Election by vote was considered **undemocratic.**



Ancient vs. Modern

- The same person not repeating the same magistracy, or only rarely, except for military offices.
- For example: Someone could serve on the Council of the 500 (the “executive government” of ancient Athens) only a few times in their lifetime.
- Father of the House: **Sir Peter Bottomley** MP from 1975



Ancient vs. Modern

- Having the terms of magistracies be short, wherever possible.
- The maximum one could hold any magistracy in ancient Rome was **1 year**.
- In the UK we have **election years**, and there is no limit on how long someone can be in office of the government.



Ancient vs. Modern

- Choosing jurors from all citizens to adjudicate all matters, or most matters, especially the most important
- In ancient courts, there were judges and no lawyers. ○
- A jury could be as...small as a few people, or as big as 6000



Ancient vs Modern

- The assembly having authority over the most important matters, while the magistrates have authority over none, or as few as possible
- This means that there was **no** executive power
- There was **no government** or no permanent government
- There were **no political parties**
- Ancient Democracy was **not Representative**
- Representation was **undemocratic**



The 30

- In 403 BCE, the Athenians lost in the Peloponnesian War.
- The victorious Spartans imposed a closed oligarchy on them.
- That oligarchy was one of 30 men (members of the aristocracy).
- The oligarchy was so closed that it was called **THE 30 TYRANTS**

Representation vs Democracy

- For the ancients representation itself (voted or not) was considered **UNDEMOCRATIC** because it is inherently oligarchic.
- Oligarchy is **the rule of the few**.
- For the ancients, the question was not who got to **vote** but who got to **make the important political decisions**.

The numbers of the Athenian Democracy

- There were about 30,000 Athenian citizen men.
150,000 citizens, including women and children, in total.
- The Athenian Assembly needed **6,000 men** for a quorum.
- So, **1 in 5 citizen men** was there making decisions.
- And **1 in 25 citizen people** was making decisions.
- Even if we count in the slaves and immigrants, then there was **1 citizen in the assembly for every 67 people** in the state.

The numbers of the House of Commons

- The 2011 census showed **63,489,234 people** in the UK.
- The 2019 election brought **650 MPs** in the House of Commons.
- This means **1 MP for every 97,675 people** in the UK

The dreaded T(yranny) word

- Under the regime of the 30 tyrants, there was 1 member in government for every 13,000 people in Athens.
- The numbers (under a view of representation) were so incredible for the ancient Greeks that they could only view this as a tyranny.
- What do you think they would think of our representative “democracy”?