

DISPUTATION CLIII

September 22, 2016

Dearest Peucinians,

Last week we discussed morality and how it applies to the great leaders in our world. Must their decisions always be grounded in said morality or can they break the code they follow to pursue another goal? This age-old topic polarized our society and we were faced with a draw yet again. Today I come to you as a temporary moderator for our next disputation, since our fearless leader is preoccupied with formulating an argument against our sacred form of government.

RESOLVED: DEMOCRACY IS OVERRATED

Affirmative: μὲνω (Meno)

Negative: 观音 (Guanyin)

How dare he! How dare Meno question the pinnacle of human governance. As a race we have constructed democracy to provide representation of all within the state. Democracy is a government for the people, by the people, and of the people. This idea was born around the fifth century B.C. in the Greek city-state known as Athens. As a direct democracy every participating citizen voted directly on legislation and executive bills. How else do we avoid corruption without allowing all to have a voice in what governs them? Pericles, during his famous funeral oration at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, extols the uniqueness and virtue of Athenian Democracy. Pericles states, “the admiration of the present and succeeding ages will be [Athens’s]”. He certainly was not wrong. Centuries later, a group of rebels in the English colonies broke free of a tyrannical monarchy and formed a new nation based on the very ideals of Athens. The Founding Fathers created “a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” All are equal to rule and all are equal to decide. As democracy moved from the ancient city to our great, large nation, many adjustments had to be made to account for population; however, the spirit has remained. Today we live in a representative democracy that provides us representation on a large scale. The American people have a choice in who leads at every level of government. Frequent elections have combated the dangers of tyranny and ambitious leaders. Although democracy disappeared from the face of the Earth for 2000 years, its ancient and modern iterations have solidified its position as the peak governing form to have ever graced the planet. However, we must ask - can we do better?

The ancient Greek philosopher Plato believes that we can. Plato rejected Athenian democracy on the basis that such democracies were anarchic societies without internal unity, that they followed citizens’ impulses rather than pursuing the common good, that democracies are unable to allow a sufficient number of their citizens to have their voices heard, and that such democracies were typically run by fools. Plato believed the Athenians mistook anarchy for freedom and that in Athenian democracy, individuals’ pursuit of their own desires led to egoism and conflict rather than the pursuit of the common good. Due to the citizens being free to pursue their passions, Plato claimed that rational leadership was impossible in Athenian democracy as elected representatives served the citizens’ passions. The ancients weren’t the only ones that saw inadequacy with democracy; the second coming, American democracy, was and is heavily criticized by many great thinkers. German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche claimed that in a democracy “[w]hen the individual’s highest and strongest instincts break forth with a passion, driving him far and above the average, beyond the lowlands of the herd conscience”, “the moral perspective now considers how harmful or harmless an opinion, an emotional state, a will, a talent is to the community, to equality”. “Exalted, self-directed spirituality, a will to solitude, even great powers of reason are felt as a danger”. His belief is that democracy “flattens souls,” that it mistakes equality for existing and pushes down those who actually have the capacity to achieve greatness.

Democracy may combat traditional tyranny, but what about the tyranny of the majority? the tyranny of the inane? But if not the people, who chooses the ones in power?

What shall we decide as a society? Does the sovereign as a whole express the general will of all the people and lead to the common good as Rousseau says? or must the masses be lead through the darkness by the enlightened shepherd? Alexis de Tocqueville states that “The [democratic] Nation, taken as a body, will be less brilliant, less glorious, less strong, perhaps; but the majority of its citizens will enjoy a more prosperous lot, and the people will show themselves to be peaceful, not because they despair of being better-off, but because they know how to be well-off.” This week we are faced with a hefty question that will bring discussion about many forms of government, but the night will surely end with a vote.

Thursday September 22nd, 8:00 PM
3rd Floor Massachusetts Hall
Semi-Formal Attire (Tie Encouraged)

Best,
Andrew Carnegie

Pinos Loquentes Semper Habemus