

Plato's Response to Protagoras' Democratic Traditionalism Issues and Implications

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Abstract: The influence of Protagoras on Plato, particularly, concerning the latter's the *Republic* is underemphasized. Perhaps, the reason for this reduction of accolade to Protagoras owes to his classification as a Sophist. Yet, democracy is the outcome of the endeavour of Sophists. A foremost Sophist, Protagoras marshaled out two vital points to place the quest for a democratic tradition ahead of the desire for Athenian hegemonic aristocracy. His points being that: first, when it comes to 'technical skills,' the gods granted upper hand to aristocrats, therefore, no one should contest their 'technical wisdom' or expertise. Second, however, when it regards 'political virtues' -- *dikê* (i.e., justice, a sense of right, what is fair) and *aidôs* (i.e., restraint, modesty, a sense of respect for others) -- the gods distributed them equally among humans to enable humanity to live harmoniously in society, thus, everyone's view counts in matter of politics. Strongly opposed to this Protagoras' democratic traditionalism, Plato responded that justice, which is the hardcore of the state, requires that each individual be assigned a primary station of life where they perform functions most suited to their nature and training. He, therefore, advised that political leadership be entrusted to a small class of naturally endowed and politically educated elite, whose responsibility it is to steer the ship of the state. The context of this intergenerational dialogue is in the long drawn '*physis-nomôs*' or 'nature-nurture' debate that characterized ancient Athenian politics and which subtle influence remains unabated to the present day. This article attempts to unveil the impacts and implications of the clash of ideas of these great Archaic scholars on the nature of modern politics. It finds that although Protagoras' democratic traditionalism makes the broader appeal to the wider populations of modern states, Plato's aristocratic elitism reigns supreme in the determination of political outcomes, especially, where and when the political elites conscientiously apply Heraclitus' hegemonic principle of 'the single continuing element.'

Keywords: Plato, Protagoras, democracy, aristocracy, justice.

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I.

In the *Republic*, Plato attempts to unveil the nature of justice. He excavated an ontological characteristic of this virtue in what one describes as Plato's 'meta-change'.¹ Then, additionally, succeeded in establishing a sort of pragmatic or, say, utilitarian order² of this virtue, not only by universalizing it, but by having it

¹ This is best understood in terms of what I refer to as Plato's 'principle of irreversibility.' In developing his theory of justice, Plato ties individual functions in society to natural talent. The state, according to him, is to assign each individual to an unchangeable primary station of life. This permanentization of a person's place in society and role or function throughout one's lifetime is what I call Plato's 'meta-change.' The word 'meta' being of Greek origin meaning "after" or "beyond" and the English word 'change' implying "restructuring," "alteration," "transition," etc. In this context of Plato's theory of justice, 'meta-change' is Plato's doctrine that there shall be no restructuring of his model of the 'perfect' or 'ideal' state, which he considers as a superior *polis* to any other kind of *polis* that had existed or will ever come into existence. Thus, Plato's 'meta-change' refers to his doctrine of resistance to restructuring his prototype city. It is the policy of non-restructuring of key foundational structures of empirical states modeled after Plato's prototype.

² Most of the West or global north and the colonies of these imperialist states are ordered in such a manner that they bear the characteristics of Plato's totalitarian prototype. Structural change to their foundations (especially, attempts to restructure the basic This is an open access article under the [CC BY-NC](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) license

passed down across several generations to the present. Thus, it appears, and incontrovertibly so too, that pursuit of 'meta-change' constitutes Plato's ultimate reason for venturing into the nature-nurture debate. Michael J. White aptly expatiates this debate as follows: "On the one side of this antithesis, there is *physis* or nature, with its connotations of immutability and necessity. If something exists 'by *physis*' then that is the way that it always was and is and always necessarily will be."³

The opposing side, according to White, argues in favour of *nomôs*, which is "usually translated as 'law', but law in the sense of the term that presupposes a law giver."⁴ Citing Ferdinand Tönnies, White writes: "an acting subject - believer, practitioner

structure of their previously colonized states) appears to be close to impossibility. The pragmatic or utilitarian value of Plato's justice lies in its empowerment of colonial powers to everlastingly subjugate their colonies which primary stations in globalism is production of raw materials, agricultural products and cheap labour in contrast with the advantages of the colonizers, who assume global leadership.

³ Michael J. White, *Political Philosophy: An Historical Introduction*, Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 2003, p.13.

⁴ Michael J. White, *Political Philosophy: An Historical Introduction*, p.13.

or apportioner - a mind from which the *nomôs* emanates.”⁵ Continuing, he says: *nomôs* accommodates “the ideas of custom and convention and connotes contingency, or even artificiality.”⁶ This implies that whatever has origin in custom might not have always been as it is currently since someone, probably, at some point in the past suggested alteration as to how it used to be done. In other words, what some persons currently hold as natural traditions are, possibly, outcomes of past conventions; therefore, faltering their inflexibility.

At the heart of this debate, especially, as could be deduced from Plato, are the questions: What form of constitutional arrangements best guarantee justice in a state? How is a just system of government to be established and sustained? Or, how and why is it that some societies are incapable of achieving justice? (Luke Purshouse 9). Other questions arising from the debate include: Who is best fitted to rule the state -- the aristocrat or the democrat? Or, which, between aristocracy and democracy constitutes the best form of government for the State? The debate also, importantly, concerns truth: Is reality *absolute* or *relative*? Are there *absolutes* or only *relatives*? These questions underlay the contest between the sophist Protagoras and the ancient Athenian sage Plato as was for the several other sophists and sages of Greek antiquity. Plato argued against the position of Protagoras who lived a generation before him. While the latter argued in favour of democracy or inclusive governance and liberalism, therefore, supported democrats and relativism, the former loathed democracy, favoured aristocratic rule or exclusive governance and advocated absolutism or totalitarianism because he believed and promoted *absolutes* as the ontological constituents of reality. This subject becomes worthy of study to throw light on current democratic experiences and demonstrate the remote or hidden ideas that shape these experiences. With hardly any surviving natural aristocracies today, current ‘aristocrats’ seem to favour a blend of aristocracy and democracy in a system of governance called by the latter appellation, but almost absolutely controlled by small privileged elite classes.

II.

In most of recorded Greek historical antiquity, particularly, during the period between the seventh or the sixth century B. C. up to about the end of the ancient period, a long lasting debate really dragged: its theoretical framework, apparently, wraps around a thesis provided by the combined teaching of doctrines of ‘an Athenian religious doctrine’ and the city-state’s ‘cultural philosophy.’ The thesis orientates Athenians as follows:

- (i) A social instinct has been implanted in the nature of every human that it is rewarding for everyone to live in society⁷;

- (ii) Society is to be governed by law and justice, both of which provide order;
- (iii) Intelligence and virtue are to rule, while those without these qualities or live with lesser degrees of them are to be ruled; and,
- (iv) The reverse should not be the case.⁸

This cultural thesis submitted by proponents of the Greek idealistic traditionalism was drawn from the aristocratic structural constitution of the Athenian *polis*⁹. Athens was hierarchically structured into three politically and economically recognizable and distinguishable social classes. The first was the upper class made up of the citizens; the second was the middle class occupied by the metics or foreign born and the lower class populated by the freedmen made up the third class. Members of the upper class were people parented by indigenous Athenians identified variously as aristocrats, villagers and merchants. The aristocrats ruled, even though broadly these clans collaboratively held political and military powers. They practiced politics of dominance over the other classes; thus, overall control of the state originally belonged to them as their exclusive preserve. Besides, they shone as the most powerful and richest people in the Athenian society and the freedmen, the worst off.

The sociopolitical circumstances described above was nurtured by the religio-cultural doctrine of traditional Athens, which promoted *monarchia*, a system of government that empowers an individual to hold sole primacy or power over citizens he brings under his dominance. Hesiod’s Theogony which presented Zeus as sole ruler of the Greek gods and “the monarchies of the ancient Mycenaean and Near Eastern kingdoms” (Nightingale 180) appear to have been inspirations for this Athenian cultural outlook.

This monopolistic and authoritarian governance system would, however, be challenged over time. In the first half of the sixth century B.C., Anaximander, whom Simplicius says, “articulated his theories in rather poetic language,¹⁰” developed a theory of the indeterminate Boundless (*tou apeiron*), a sort of divine principle that generates cosmic elements and governs the universe, but whose sovereignty was not in the manner of the despotic gods of ancient Greece. Rather, Anaximander’s

⁸ See: Bruno Ikuli, 2016-2017: p. 212. Note that Plato makes this proposition of the Athenian cultural philosophy the central doctrine, the climax, and *terminus ad quem* of his search for the core principle constitutive of the nature of justice in the state. His conviction that aristocrats are best fitted to rule the state, while aristocracy makes the best form of government led to his ‘principle of meta-change,’ which urges aristocratic take-back of political power from democrats.

⁹ This study, by implication, rejects the scholarly tradition of abstraction of philosophic texts “from the historical and cultural contexts that ground these discourses.” That is, it cast aside the approach of John Burnet, who characterized Archaic philosophy as “The Greek Miracle;” and, rather, it embraces the scholarly methods of the French writers, Gernet, Detienne and Vernant, who took the political, social and technological developments of Archaic Greece into serious consideration when interpreting the thoughts of the ancient Greek thinkers. See: Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *The Philosophers in Archaic Greek Culture*, Cambridge University Press (online): 2009: pp. 169 - 170.

¹⁰ See: Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *The Philosophers in Archaic Greek Culture*, Cambridge University Press (online): 2009: p. 178.

benevolent *tou apeiron* regulates the universe via strict adherence to natural laws and enthronement of *isonomia* where *monarchia* originally occupied. By so doing, his Boundless ably protected the lawful order of the universe. Anaximander's portrayal of the cosmic elements (hot, cold, wet and dry), which though generated from the Boundless, but interlocked perpetually in a struggle for power and dominance, demonstrated ethical shortcomings in the elements, figuratively speaking. Despite their struggles for power and dominance, the advantages gained by one or another, every now and then, ultimately, fail to produce an actually lasting victory over the others; rather, there always remained a balance of power.

Anaximander's solution to the quagmire of power struggle phenomena was introduction of "an entity "in the middle" (*epi tou mesou*) with characteristic exhibition of "like relations" (*homoiotes*) to all points of the celestial circumference conceptions it will maintain a stable position within the equilibrium" (181). Nightingale citing Morris points out that Anaximander employed the 'middling' ideology to reflect the emerging social and political trend during his time. The middle and lower classes of the Greek city-states had, indeed, thinned out of patience with their aristocratic despots; in their frustration, they conceived the democratic principle of equality of citizens, which required placement of power "in the middle" (*es meson*), where it can be shared. By the sixth century B.C., at least, according to Horodotus' record of what transpired in Samos, it had become apparent that a twist had occurred in the fortune of the aristocratic class. This happened with the entrance of philosophy into the socio-political domain of Archaic Greece. It spelt alteration to the political formula of the ancient kingdom. Concerning this change, D. F. M. Strauss writes thus:

During the seventh and sixth centuries B. C. -- the period when Greek philosophy entered the scene -- Greek society experienced the turmoil of a transitional phase in all its facets. The reign of the noble patrician clans during the age of chivalry was now confronted with a process of cultural development and differentiation. The traditional sources of economic income of the nobility, agriculture and stock-breeding, soon was overshadowed by the money aristocracy (46).

The social upheavals did not only reinforce belief in 'middling' and in the conception of equality of all people before the law among the non-aristocratic clans; it also heightened their conviction as to why turns should be taken between the aristocrats and commoners to govern the *polis* and be governed in return based on democratic principles. This *contra*-traditional idealism essentially fueled the transmogrification of the social and political landscapes of the Greek *poleis*; but not everyone finds comfort with this development.

An early defense of the aristocratic rule was ventilated by Heraclitus, who urged the Athenian youths to "fight for the law as for their city wall." Yet, Heraclitus himself personally lacked sufficient strong will to protect aristocracy against the upsurge of democratic forces. Hence, although he appeared to have argued in favour of aristocracy, he could not coherently and thoroughly push his argument in a hardliner's manner to its systematic logical conclusion. It took Plato, a few centuries later, to radically advance Heraclitus' thought towards its absolutist logical completion.¹¹

Thus, while Plato would absolutely resist change to aristocratic rule, particularly, by way of opposition to democracy; on his part, Heraclitus was overwhelmed by the phenomenon of change, he made excuses for it, he allowed it, albeit reluctantly. He says, "all things are in flux," hence, things are constantly changing: "you cannot step twice into the same river" since "fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you." (Stumpf 13). Furthermore, he points out that things change and assume several different forms, but inside them lurks *something* that continues to stay constant in the midst of flux of change. That *something*, Heraclitus says: is 'the single continuing element,' 'the one.'¹² He says: it establishes some basic unity between itself and the many. That which remains constant in the midst of the flux of change, Heraclitus believes, provides stability. He stressed, therefore, that 'the many find their unity in the One,' and 'what appear to be disjointed events and contradictory forces are in reality intimately harmonized.' (Stumpf 15). This way, he seemed to stand neutral in the groundwork of the nature-nurture debate.

III.

Although, Nightingale argues that Heraclitus stayed neutral in the *physis-nomôs* debate, this remains doubtful. Despite hailing from Ephesus, Heraclitus was an aristocrat by birth; and, both Athens and Ephesus shared some common experiences. Furthermore, features of Heraclitus' teachings show he did not simply distinguish between the elites and commoners, he regularly referred to the latter as being asleep, while he eulogized the former. Hence, if there exists any difficulty in determining if or not Heraclitus sided with the traditional position with its *physis*' thesis, such doubtful tendency does not extend to the standpoint of Protagoras (481-411BC?).

Protagoras belonged to the generation before Plato's (428/7-347BC). He had strong reservations against the Athenian religious doctrine and its cultural philosophy. Also, he actively engaged in the controversy with an obdurate support for the sophistic position. Overall, the sophists, who practiced their trade beginning in the fifth and fourth centuries B. C., had asked an ultimate question: "what constitutes virtues (*aretai*, in Greek)?" Lurked in this interrogative sits a deep quest to determine, if or not, the state originates by human nature (*physis*) or by law or convention (*nomôs*). Also hidden in the question is the desire to determine which should be subordinated to the other -- state or individual? In another sense, the same question seeks to justify which -- between aristocracy and democracy -- makes the best form of government? In all of the above, Protagoras made a distinctive contribution to the debate, one which featured prominently in Plato's dialogue titled *Protagoras*, and which sketchy version can be extracted from the sophist's own work, *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

Protagoras' view is derived from a myth he fabricated. The kernel of his contribution to the dispute is his distinction between

dichotomy from the vantage of objectivity and appears to have taken no side in the debate, instead maintained neutrality.

¹² Here, Heraclitus is probably being influenced by Anaximander's *tou apeiron* which sticks to natural law in its bid to maintain the order of the cosmos immune to the distractions caused by the chaotic forces in the universe. Perhaps, too, it was his tacit suggestion and a sort of discrete motivation of the aristocratic clan goading their use of superior reasonability, patience and perseverance to outmaneuver, outclass and master rival clans in the everlasting bid for retention of unyielding hold on power.

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¹¹ This analysis seems agreeable with Nightingale's view, who opines that Heraclitus looked at the nature-nurture or *physis-nomôs*

‘technical wisdom’ and ‘political virtues.’ According to him, with technical skills, humans “discovered articulate speech and names, and invented houses and clothes and shoes and bedding and got food from the earth.”¹³ The gods, according to his myth, made unequal distribution of technical skill to humans, it caused inequality in individual talents; while, on the other hand, they shared political wisdom or skill equally among humans. The equal distribution of political skill, Protagoras says, was intended by the gods to enable application of the principle of equality in the *polis*. Humans, he insists, would not be able to live peaceably in society if they do not share equally in political wisdom. The political *arétai*, which humans share equally, he says, are: *dikê* (i.e., justice, a sense of right, what is fair) and *aidôs* (i.e., restraint, modesty, a sense of respect for others). Subsequently, Protagoras makes it plain that when it comes to technical or professional expertise only the advice of the ‘few’ is required; while equal share of *aidôs* among citizens requires collective participation in the governance process of the state.¹⁴ The implication, therefore, is that while technical expertise determines that a paltry minority of gifted professionals take decision; in political matters, decision making was not reserved for just a few, but left to the equal participation of every citizen as a matter of rights in the administration of the State.

[Social] Justice, therefore, in Protagoras’ opinion requires the advantages of the ‘few,’ the ‘technically gifted’ or ‘masters of the arts’ be restricted to the corridors of the private sector. Conversely, administration of the public sphere, the domain of state politics, should be open to all and sundry, in an inclusive democratic process, which involves everyone and respects the rights and interests of every citizen. Clearly, Protagoras’ thought contravened the interests and arguments of the aristocrats, who conceived political leadership as their exclusive right, thus, opposed to the involvement of commoners in the political processes of the state.

IV.

Although, Protagoras’ argument appealed to the ‘many,’ it did not impress the enlightened minority. His view aroused a blow back from aristocrats, whose opinion was that state administration is such a weighty affair that did not require treating with levity by putting it at the disposal of commoners, but be left to the care of experts. One such sympathizer with the aristocratic course is Plato, who undertook a project to respond to Protagoras and others via the *Republic*. The project was a theoretical argumentation targeted, ultimately, at influencing the retrieval of political power lost to Athenian democrats,¹⁵ restoring same back to the Athenian

aristocrats and drawing up a blueprint for the foundation future empirical states. In the *Republic*, besides addressing the opinions of other leaders, Plato seems to have subtly focused on responding to three fundamental arguments raised by Protagoras.

When observed carefully, it becomes noticeable that the *Republic* subtly responds to the arguments featured by Protagoras. This renowned and foremost sophist had argued that:

- a. “technical wisdom” is distributed unequally among humans; it grants advantage to a few relative to the population of the society, such that when it regards “excellence [*aretê*] in building, or in any other craft, the Athenians, like other men, believe that few are capable of giving advice, and if someone outside those few volunteers to advise them, then ... they do not tolerate it.”¹⁶
- b. “But when the subject of their counsel involves political *aretê*, which must always follow the path of justice and moderation [or temperance, self-control: *sophrosunê*], they listen to every man’s opinion, for they think that everyone must share in this kind of *aretê*; otherwise the state could not exist.”¹⁷
- c. Government is an outcome of convention, custom or law; not a natural artifice; it is what the community chooses to practice that becomes the norm, not vice versa: “Man is the measure of all things, of those that are that they are, and of those that are not that they are not” (Omoregbe 86 -87).

In response to Protagoras, Plato denied that the gods distributed political virtues equally among humans, which is to say, he tried to negate Protagoras’ view that political virtues -- *dikê* and *aidôs* -- are shared equally by humans. Using the argument of co-relations between human nature and natural law as developed by the stoics, he attempted to finalize a few sub-arguments within the overall framework of the *physis-nomôs* debate. The stoics, a Roman cult-like and somewhat religious group, had “introduced the idea that reason was the identifying principle for both the natural world and for human beings” (Mitchell 359). They credit the order in the heavenly bodies and the regularities of earthly seasons to divine intelligence. Logic, they say, rules the emotions in human beings and enable them to stay rational; and, in concordance with some Archaic Greek thinkers -- Anaximander and, particularly, Heraclitus -- they hold that “both the natural and human domains are governed by reason” (Mitchell 359).

inadvertently, refuse to appropriate the wisdom and experience of the widely learned; this way, the *polis* suffers avoidable setbacks. Ultimately, Plato holds that democratic Athens was politically far off the Form of a perfect state and its moral condition was evil. He urged aristocrats to strive for positions of governance to dislodge the inadequately prepared democrats, at least, for the sake of overcoming the painful experience of being ruled by intellectual misfits. He says: “the heaviest of all penalties is to be governed by a worse man.” (*Rep.*347d).

¹⁶ Transl. W. K. C. Guthrie [modified], “Protagoras” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971, 322d-323a cited in White, 2003: p.14-15).

¹⁷ Transl. W. K. C. Guthrie [modified], “Protagoras” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971, 322d-323a cited in White, 2003: p.15).

¹³ Protagoras 322a cited in Michael J. White, *Political Philosophy: An Historical Introduction*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003, 14.

¹⁴ Protagoras says that prior to Zeus’ instruction to Hermes to gift humans equal share of ‘political virtues,’ “when they gathered in communities they injured one another for want of political skill.” (Protagoras 322b cited in Michael J. White, 2003: p.14). Furthermore, he (Protagoras) contends that: “There could never be cities if only a few shared in these virtues, as in the arts.” (Protagoras 322c cited in White, 2003: p.14).

¹⁵ Plato viewed these ordinary folks, commoners, drawn from the masses with disdain. He, an aristocrat, bitterly blamed the democrats for the defeat of Athens by Sparta over the long drawn Peloponnesian war. He opined that poorly educated democrats lack both requisite competence and efficiency to govern the state; given power, they make bad judgments, expose the state to misrule and incline the *polis* for loss of lives and fortune. Furthermore, he argues that they foreclose alternative viewpoints; and so,

Logos, according to the stoics, produced a natural law which puts the heavenly bodies in their proper places and determined their appropriate relationships much as the same natural law provided order and hierarchy to human society. In line with this stoic's view, Plato argued that "an elite class,¹⁸ rather than the common people, should rule" (Mitchell 356). He argued that: by nature 'some are born to rule, others are born to follow,'¹⁹ a view which even Aristotle strongly supported, and Plato readily fabricated 'a noble lie'²⁰ to defend. Plato's 'noble lie' aimed to defend his categorization of people three classes of (1) rulers, who provide political leadership to the state, (2) guardians/soldiers that guard the state, and (3) producers, who provide goods and services. The three are respectively guided by the following virtues: wisdom, courage and temperance. In place of Protagoras' equal gift of *dikê* and *aidôs* for harmonious working relationships and stability of the state, Plato provided the economic principles of 'specialization of labour' and 'reciprocity or fair exchanges.' He demonstrated that these principles required that each person specializes in functions best suited to their nature and fairly exchange outcomes of their primary assignments with their compatriots.

By the foregoing, Plato believed that he had addressed Protagoras' democratic concern about *dikê* (i.e., justice, a sense of right, what is fair) and *aidôs* (i.e., restraint, modesty, a sense of respect for others) after he treated justice as a kind of craft or skill (*technê*). This way, rather than Protagoras' democratic equalitarianism, he recommended aristocratic meritocracy²¹ for a person's placement in the hierarchy of the society; and, suggested the economic principles of 'specialization of labour' and 'reciprocity or fair exchanges' to meet the requirements of *dikê* and *aidôs* in the state. For justice, a sense of right and what is fair (*dikê*), he declared an open but rigorous process of education, by which end those who excel rise to the top -- the peak of which stays inhabited by the Philosopher-King. On the other hand, to cater for self-restraint, moderation and a sense of respect for others (*aidôs*), Plato forbade interloping meddlesomeness as well as the act of change of primary station of life (*Rep*, IV, 434b-435a).

Finally, Plato makes his most damning argument ever toward sealing the fate of democrats. The argument invokes the 'principle of irreversibility of functions.' It is the *culmen* or *apogee* of Plato's response to Protagoras and the sophists in general. This argument basically appeals for the arrest of change upon the

attainment of the Utopia. For Plato, the Utopia is reached only after it is established that none other rules the state except the philosopher-king. He writes: "until the class of philosophers be invested with the supreme authority in a city, such a city and its citizens will find no rest from ills, and the fabled city in speech will not be in deed" (*Republic*, Bk. VI, 501e). In other words, for Plato, the Utopian state materializes with the emergence of the class of philosopher-rulers. Also, the rule of the philosopher-kings must not be a temporary arrangement that could be alternated with populist regimes, but that aristocracy be permanentized as best of models of political organizations. Hence, he added the 'principle of irreversibility of functions' or insisted on enactment of an 'act against interloping meddlesomeness.'²² This principle of 'irreversibility of primary station of life,' is his most advanced layer of protection of the ruling class, and/or reinforcement, of his earlier principles of 'division of labour' and 'fair exchanges or reciprocity.'

Plato's ultimate response to Protagoras, therefore, is enwrapped in his unyielding defense of aristocracy -- its values, ways of life and attitudes -- and insisting on its position as the best form of government. Put otherwise, for Plato, those best fitted to rule must possess a mix of wisdom, courage and prudence as their natural assets. These persons, he says, are thinkers, members of the clan of aristocrats. Reserving governance as their exclusive preserve is, for Plato, natural justice; and, this kind of justice only obtains "when each order - tradesman, Auxiliary, Guardian - keeps to its own proper business in the commonwealth and does its own work." (*Republic*, 434c; Baird and Kaufman 100). To allow the small class of elites to rule, Plato declares "is justice and what makes a just society." (434c; 100). To do otherwise, is for him, injustice; for, it is wrong to subject the 'class of the wise' under the rule of 'appetitive spirits.'

V.

Currently, the intensity of the nature-nurture debate appears to have significantly waned out over the past several millennia. However, has the debate died away? Actually, not at all: the key contentious issues linger on, albeit they have assumed considerably strange and warped natures. Aristocracy and democracy, for instance, which in the period of Archaic Greece were markedly different types of governments and operated exclusively of each other are nowadays, sometimes, so intricately intertwined together that hardly can someone say distinguish if an operational government is a democracy or an aristocracy or an oligarchy. In these situations, oligarchy or aristocracy gets too intermingled with democracy - the hybrid is masqueraded as some form of democracy.

In expressing a similar opinion as the above, Albert Ogoko fingers the profuseness of dictatorship in today's democracy. He says: "Most governments in Africa are dictatorial even when they brandish democracy" (13). On another hand, Francis Njoku cites example of Adolf Hitler who described Nazism as 'true democracy.' (161). Funny, it seems, yet these examples reveal how

¹⁸ In the *Statesman*, Plato writes: "Only in the hands of a select few or of the enlightened individual can we look for that right of exercising political power which is itself the true constitution." (297b7-c).

¹⁹ This Plato's claim is reinforced by Aristotle when he writes that: "In the first place there must be a union of ... natural ruler and subject, that both may be preserved. For that which can foresee by exercise of mind is by nature intended to be lord and master, and that which can with its body give effect to such foresight is a subject, and by nature a slave." (*Politics*, Bk I, 2, 25, 30).

²⁰ Plato, *Republic*, III, 315c-d. Here, Plato is willing to tell lies to the citizens that they are made differently by nature, that the god who created them mixed gold into those to rule, silver into the auxiliaries and then iron and copper into the cultivators of the soil and other workers.

²¹ Plato writes: "... we must select from the whole body of guardians those individuals who appear to us, after due observation, to be remarkable above others for the zeal with which, through their whole life, they have done what they thought advantageous to the state, and inflexibly refused to do what they thought the reverse." *Rep*, III, 412d

²² "... we have often heard people say that to mind one's own business, and not be meddlesome, is justice; and we have often said the same thing ourselves." (*Rep*, Bk. IV, 432d, 1997: p. 129).

deceitfully the democratic appellation has become. The fact is, that, in several democracies presently, a minuscule class of elites have managed to seize power and control of the political apparatuses of states and their power mechanisms, and the will of the aristocratic minority prevails over and above that of the poverty-ridden majority. Also, despite the generally flawed democratic systems, governance continues uninterrupted as the oligarchy or aristocracy purchases the votes, rights and freedoms of the gullible many, and wields sufficiently substantial monetary and political powers to crush holders of dissident opinions.

The aforesaid, one can argue, actualizes Heraclitus' pronouncement that 'the many find their unity in the One,' and 'what appear to be disjointed events and contradictory forces are in reality intimately harmonized.' It appears to be a materialization or fulfillment of Heraclitus' prophecy. Indeed, in nearly every democracy in the world today -- the West inclusive -- Africa's the most glaring, the presence of dominant classes of minority elites tend to assume the function of Heraclitus' 'single continuing element,' 'the one.' One way that this 'single continuing element' expresses its monopolistic and authoritarian governance system similar to the practice in traditional Archaic Greek culture is by being despotic, although, this time around under cover of democratic regimes. Thus, current democratic realities embodied by these small classes of elites show disinterestedness and unwillingness to tolerate views of the majority.

Contemporary democratic experience, therefore, show that there is a problem with accepting and applying Anaximander's solution to the quagmire of power struggle phenomena. Recall that Anaximander had provided "an entity "in the middle" (*epi tou mesou*) with characteristic exhibition of "like relations" (*homoioites*) to all points of the celestial circumference convinced it will maintain a stable position within the equilibrium." One clear evidence of intolerance of this 'middling' ideology reflects in the corrosion and depletion of the middle class in most democratic societies leading to wide gulf between the elite classes and dregs class, where the former exercises absolute political power and control of the state, while the latter live at its complete behest. This way, the successful elimination of the middle class, which traditionally automates the democratic processes of a state and act as its key driving force becomes effectively weakened or completely obliterated. In such a situation, although what exists appears to be a democracy, what actually exists isn't one; rather, the guise of democracy could be an aristocracy. In these states, *ipso facto*, the democratic principle of equality of citizens requiring placement of power "in the middle" (*es meson*), where it could be fairly shared is rejected and jettisoned by the aristocratic masquerades in contemporary democracies.

The implication, therefore, is a rejuvenation of the despotic gods of ancient Athenian aristocracy in contemporary democratic regimes. The Anaximander's like benevolent *tou apeiron* which regulates the state via strict adherence to natural laws and enthronement of *isonomia* is seen to be strategically, tactically and methodically being chipped away. It suggests a sort of resurgence of *monarchia* or *aristokrasia* in the guise of democracy. This way, despite the apparent 'awake-ness' of the masses through periodic protests, the balance of power obviously tilts rather permanently to the advantage of the elites' class, which exercises no hesitation in employing its acquired power and dominance to repress opposition against its will. Thus, contrary to Anaximander's observation in ancient Athens that no class acquired 'lasting victory over the others, all there was is a balance of power,' in this material period,

the aristocratic class has mastered how to make its victories to endure. Obviously, therefore, these totalitarian forces possess the upper hand in the existing political order such that reference to justice in the state, is alternative way of acknowledging the villain's justice.

In other words, today's democracies seem to be thinly different from outright totalitarianisms. In them, justice suggests something of the form of Calliclean and Thrasymachian concepts of justice, where, respectively, 'Might is right' and *dikê* is 'advantage of the stronger party.' Even Karl Popper accused Plato of adopting these conceptions of justice to fabricate his Utopian doctrine of harmonious state management. By every existing or conceivable yardstick today, right appears to be the will of the rich and powerful in society. Hence, justice in today's democracy appears not to be different from the aristocratic definition given to it by Callicles in his Dialogue, *Georgias*. He says: "justice consists in the superior ruling over and having more than the inferior" ('qtd' in Rosen 39). The identity of Callicle's 'superior' matches with the small, but dominant group of elites that has managed to successfully establish some basic unity between itself and the many in each democratic state. These small, but overwhelming groups of elites within democratic regimes have actually constituted themselves as the determiners of the conditions for stability of states. It is in this sense that it is sometimes viewed that what the world describes as democracy today is somewhat a popularized version of aristocracy.

VI.

The shortcomings of democracy notwithstanding, it remains the choice system of government in the twenty-first century. Perhaps, this is the reason why rather than struggle for an independent aristocratic government of states, its advocates silently seek survival and control of democratic states. As a system of government, none rivals democracy since its beginnings in the seventh century B. C. to this twenty-first century A. D. No other system of government rivals its popularity and desirability. Gerry Stoker writes that: "Democratic governance is widely supported in the public opinion expressed by the peoples of the world, regardless of culture, religion or other factors" (29). According to him, "The great drive to democracy that dominated the last quarter of the twentieth century started with the collapse of the European dictatorships in Portugal, Spain and Greece in the 1970s" (26). Asides Europe and America, democracy has been widely embraced in the Latin American countries, Asia, Africa and all around the world.

Clearly, the wide embrace of democracy everywhere is a testimony of the popular acceptance of the philosophy driving it. That philosophy is basically laid down by Protagoras, who offered *dikê* (a sense of right and what is fair) and *aidôs* (restraint, modesty, a sense of respect for others) as the foundational basis for this system of government and the core reason for the stability of states. The popularity of democracy among the greatest number of people globally is a statement of approval invariably of Protagoras' position in the *physis-nomôs* or nature-nurture debate. On the other hand, the rejection of dictatorship or despotism in favour of democracy in the twentieth century by prominent European states is a categorical statement against the position of Plato in the same debate.

As recap, it is worth restating clearly that Protagoras' argument which seeks liberalization of the political landscape of states and advocates for inclusive politics conjours mass appeal

today as was in his own time. A reason for this broad-based acceptance of Protagoras' suggestion hangs on the fact that justice -- both as *dikê* and *aidôs* -- quite requires participation or involvement of every member of society. Without the active or deliberate efforts on part of everyone to pursue just acts or, restrain from unjust ones, states will stay at risk of rapid and chaotic degeneration into a Hobbes-like 'state of nature.' In other words, Protagoras' argument rooting for democratic practice meets contemporary expectation. This way, his position makes greater sense and suitability with the nature of humans than does the view of Plato.

Nevertheless, Plato raised a very vital point: the issue of the 'ignorant many' being desirous of leading the state and dictating to the 'few wise.' Does it actually make sense for the ignorant to take decision on behalf of the knowledgeable? It seems that Protagoras, still, provides an answer to this question. Whether as regards special skills or in matters of politics, the superior knowledge should be accepted and applied for the development of the society and human resources. Protagoras' argument is that: regarding 'technical skills' while the learned few are undeniably superior in that sort of knowledge, the same permanent exaltation of a set of people as being all-knowing cannot be applied to them in matters of governance; rather, sufficient space should be left open for the free contribution of all, and at last, let the best idea(s) prevail.

In other words, the best system of government is that which is open to the best ideas through free speech; the best fitted to rule is the sovereign who is willing to listen and adapt the best ideas regardless of who makes them; the best government for guaranteeing justice in the the state is that that maintains rule of law and treat residents equally; and about absolutes and relatives, reality contains them both, rulers and governments must be open to apply which most fits a situation. In all, democracy and democrats prevail over aristocracy and totalitarians.

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