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***THE IDEAL CONSTITUTION
ACCORDING TO PERICLES***

Athens of Pericles is called a democracy. But is it? Athens was indeed a form of democracy. This was what existed. Two tendencies were noted. The one wanted this constitution to be more democratic (more democracy) and the other to make it more aristocratic. My study attempts an answer to the eternal question of whether Pericles was democratic or aristocratic.

Pericles is, on the one hand, a true democrat for two reasons: firstly, he aspires to the collective and, secondly, he cares for equality (to the degree that this is beneficial). Pericles is, on the other hand, deeply aristocratic, because his main concern is that in every field (small or large, low or high), the *aristoi* (best) of any given moment rise to the top and rule in accordance with their abilities, which are demonstrated in competition.

Pericles does not hesitate between the two (contradictory) constitutions. No, he interweaves two political forms that are truly contradictory into the best harmony. How? In many ways; as a politician, the highest form of teacher, he gives us an example of his functionality with the Funeral Oration, inspired, as I believe, from Olympia. I have the rare opportunity and pleasure to teach postgraduate students from 200 States in the International Olympic Academy at Olympia and in this holy place I obtained the idea that the Funeral Oration of Pericles springs from the Olympic spirit [see E.Mikrogiannakis ,Olympic Democracy, Pericles'Funeral Oration Revisited,Nikephoros 21,2008,133-157].

What happened at Olympia? All citizens of the Greek states are *invited*. The invitation is even made officially. It was a punishable offence to impede anyone who wished to go to Olympia to compete.

The next stage completes the democratic aspect: all athletes compete under the same conditions, which are indisputable. The athletes are invited to ἄμιλλα, competition, and they accept. The first part of the word *hamilla* is *hama*. *Hama* indicates similarly, together, under the same conditions. This ensures equality and straightforwardness. The second part of the word *hamilla* is the root of ἄλλομαι, σάλ-, αλ-, ιλ. Ἄμιλλα means ἄλλεσθαι (jump) together and under the same conditions. The athletes (runners of any kind and of the other competitions) start under the same conditions. *Hamilla* is both a condition and an action. It is momentary, and indicates motionlessness and movement together. And all this in the

present which is momentary, but which contains the before and after of the duration of time. It has been prepared in the past and hurls towards the future. Here, when the runners hear the word **apite** (:go), at the starting point, at this moment of *ῥμῖλλα* (release), is the high point of democracy. Here all are equal. For how long? Immediately after the start, in a fraction of a second, the competitors are differentiated. Democracy is lifted. Judgement is clear at the finishing line. The first, the second, the last are separated. Importance is attached mainly to the victor. This starting also (this *ἀπιέναι*, to start the race, departure), discerns democracy and aristocracy. They are two distinct fields that should not be merged. Democracy triumphs in the first and aristocracy in the second. Competition is the tip, the edge, the watershed.

Imagine what would have happened if an attempt was made, with some kind of equaliser, to maintain the stand of equality. The athletes would all reach the finishing line together. In that case, what is the contest for? It would have no meaning. Some would say: *Égalité* is a very good thing and we should maintain it. In athletics, however, such an action is a disaster, and would indeed require a tiresome effort. To sum up: Equality and Liberty are inconsistent.

Transferring this sporting image to the political sphere, we can see that wherever, after some equalising revolution and as a characteristic of it, an attempt is made to maintain equality in a violent fashion and with the rallying cry of permanent revolution, we have constant turmoil.

Any kind of *ἐπανισοῦν* (equalising) can be disastrous in its application, if it is imposed from outside. When Alcibiades, the Athenian eminent politician, approached the Persians, advised them that the only effortless way to destroy (annihilate) the Greeks was *ἐπανισοῦν* (neutralise them systematically). In this case, *ἐπανισοῦν* took the form of reinforcing the Spartans if the Athenians were ahead, and reinforcing the Athenians if the Spartans were ahead. The equalising of the two leading belligerents in the Greek camp (equalising by reinforcing the one in the inferior position) allows the third party (the Persians) to intervene as referee and with the equalising, (i.e. destructive role of extending the contest), to have the over hand. The contest, as is well known, finishes earlier if one of the warring parties comes out on top, whereas it is continued if the belligerents are equally strong (for their own bad luck). This is the surest way of neutralising the belligerents, and the brilliant diplomacy of the Romans (*divide et impera*), which they applied to such a degree and extent.

Equality is a wonderful concept as a starting point, a springboard. The problem is how will the shift to equality come about: in a violent, revolutionary way, or institutionally, with along established principles? The democratic element comes under the general political one, and it must be aware of its limits and leave room for the other, the aristocratic element.

There is only one political system (the polity) as the soul of the state. When one (any) of its elements were emphasised, it became autonomous and numerous forms resulted. According to Aristotle there are six main forms: three correct political systems (kingship, aristocracy and polity) and three incorrect ones (deviations), tyranny, oligarchy and democracy.

A necessary observation: if Aristotle were today to survey the 200 or so political systems of all the world's states (which all, as a rule, bear the title of democracy), he would not find a single one that would accord with this title. The majority are mixed, but called democracies, because the people are, according to Aristophanes, *εὐχολήτευτοι*, easily charmed and each likes to be presented as ruler even when he has no power. Aristotle highlights the meaning of the participation of the *demos* in power, and clarifies in his *Politics* its extent in a *well mixed constitution*. For the *demos* it is sufficient, according to Solon, to have two things: to elect the rulers and to monitor them (bring charges against, punish and reimburse them). Where the *demos* seeks continuous equality and levelling, where it hates the rise of the best, and fights every *ἀριστινίδην* (election according to merit or to birth) their political life proceeds at a snail's pace or is in turmoil. Disharmony in political life occurs also when the *aristoi*, those who would rise on the basis of their abilities, constitute a closed circle, when they entrench themselves and do not care for the whole, but only for their group interest, and do not renew themselves.

In a well-mixed constitution, channels are open. Rulers and ruled proceed hand-in-hand. Each one succeeds in relation to his proven qualification.

Long wars lasting for years (such as the Peloponnesian and the Roman Civil wars) would have been avoided or curbed if the warring parties had not become stuck in the dilemma of democracy or oligarchy (a form of which is aristocracy).

Aristocracies of all types which constitute a closed circle and do not accept new elements, and certainly not those that come about through competitions, they decline and are destroyed, first from within and secondly from without by those who want to enter but are excluded.

The functionality and viability of a constitution depend on the extent to which it distinguishes between the two stages of, so to say, democraticity and aristocraticity. And both are taught to us by athletics in the classical (ideal) way they were expressed at Olympia.

Olympia demands distinction, victory, to "come first". Athens, on the other hand, sought equality and pushed democracy. The ideal of the two places are different, in fact contrary. Can a synthesis be made?

Pericles might have sought to provide this synthesis in his Funeral Oration. In this speech an important political form emerges: a democracy with an aristocratic orientation, or an aristocracy with a democratic foundation, an *Olympian Democracy*.

In Olympian Democracy, there is a compromise between seeking of virtue and seeking of equality. The two different tendencies result in the same vision, summarized as democratization of the divine and deification of the man.