

Does democracy lead to tyranny?

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POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC THOUGHT

Does democracy lead to tyranny? From Plato to Fukuyama, this assignment will examine four different thinkers from antiquity to the contemporary modern era. The focus of the assignment will therefore be to show how the attitudes toward democracy and tyranny has shifted from an equivalency in Plato's antiquity towards them being mutually exclusive in the modern era. The nature of man and the transformation of the majority from a mob to an enlightened, free citizenship will also be shown. As such, the assignment will show the attitudes towards democracy as a function of their contemporary society.

The main literature used is the following:

- The Republic, Plato
- Two Treatises, John Locke
- The Communist Manifest, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels
- The End of History and the Last Man, Francis Fukuyama

These four thinkers have been chosen because they are relevant when discussing democracy, and because they represent different eras. However, their concepts of democracy are vastly different and depending on their time periods, with only Fukuyama having seen Liberal Democracy as we know it today, whereas the others lived through democracy where only wealthy men were able to vote. Lastly, a discussion about the meaning of democracy and majority, and how the four thinkers differ in their interpretations.

Plato

In "The Republic," Plato lets the character of Socrates present Plato's ideas on any given subject matter. Thus the following analysis will make no distinction between the two.

"...what is the nature of tyranny? It's obvious, I suppose, that it arises out of democracy."(Plato, 1987, p. 320)

Plato argues that democracy has a singular purpose - liberty. By seeking liberty at the cost of everything else, the natural hierarchies of society are broken.

Democracy causes the independence of the son to the father, pupils to the teacher, and of course, slaves to the owners. This extreme liberty leads to citizens

disregarding all laws, unwritten or written, and restraint is intolerable. "The dog comes to resemble its mistress". (Plato, 1987, p. 322) Plato then divides the democratic society into three classes - the most important of which for the development of tyranny being "the mass of the people who earn their own living, take little interest in politics and aren't very well off." (Plato, 1987, p. 324) - the proletariat. This class battling with the landowners and rich to take their share will lead to them putting forward a single popular leader. This popular leader, by virtue of representing the largest mass, will have the power in the state. Furthermore, he can control and direct the mob to do his every bidding. By using the simile of a man tasting a single piece of human flesh being destined to become a wolf, as does the popular leader - once the leader has charged a fellow citizen unjustly and sentences him to death, exiles and further executions are bound to follow. The popular leader is then forced to either be destroyed by his enemies, or to change himself from man to wolf, and make himself a tyrant. Plato argues that this popular leader starts out altruistic, but once foreign enemies are gone, he turns to the internal enemies, since there must always be a war, otherwise the people do not need a leader. He must make the choice "between a life with companions most of whom are worthless, and all of whom hate him, and an inevitable death." (Plato, 1987, p. 327) Men with courage and wisdom are the natural enemy of the popular leader, since they are all natural competitors to him. Lastly, the inevitable conclusion is that the popular leader is no longer champion of the people, since all opposition to him has been exiled or executed - he is the complete tyrant. Once this transformation is complete, it is too late - he is too powerful for the mob who originally elected him to remove him. Tyranny is parricide, not only by dissolving the inherent hierarchy between father and son, but also by having tyranny as the son of democracy. As such, Plato attempts to establish tyranny as the end point of democracy using apparent logic.

When analyzing Plato, his view on contemporary states must be incorporated. Plato was inspired by the Spartan military aristocracy, which shows in his ideal state - a hierarchical, strictly regulated, efficient military state. (Lee, 1987) Oligarchy, on the other hand, was for Plato another unfulfilling system - by virtue of having money, you had influence. "[Plato] had the deepest distrust of what would today be called the profit-motive and of the political influence of private wealth... you were bound to get increasing exploitation of poor by rich." (Lee, 1987, p. XXV) - ending in

revolution. Lastly, on Plato's own experiences with democracy: In the wake of the Peloponnesian war, a series of oligarchic governments ensued - the Council of Four Hundred, leading to the Government of the Five Thousand. Another revolution ensued, and in which "savage measures were taken by the democrats against their oligarchic opponents, so that the following six years have been described as a 'democratic terror'." (Lee, 1987, p. xiii) Following this, Plato meets Socrates for the first time, learning from and being influenced by him. The trial of Socrates led Plato to be disenchanted by contemporary politics, longing for true justice in society, by the way of true philosophy. "...mankind will have no respite from trouble until either real philosophers gain political power or politicians become by some miracle true philosophers." (Lee, 1987) Plato advocates that people like him should hold the power, for they know the true reality of things - until then, all states are badly governed.

John Locke

John Locke was born in 1632. He was educated by the church, evident by his views on God and his subjects. Following the death of Oliver Cromwell, and the restoration of the Monarchy, Locke fled for Holland. As such, the "Two Treatises of Government" may have been written as early as ten years before being safe to publish. It was only after the Glorious Revolution, the deposing of the catholic King James II for the protestant William of Orange, that Locke both returned to England and published his work. (Uzgalis, 2022). Locke being perhaps the founder of Liberalism, is therefore a clear example of the Enlightenment philosopher, with freedom being an inalienable property, and that all men are born into a state of nature as equal.

While Locke was not a democrat in the full meaning of the word, his writings on sovereignty and rulership can be interpreted as leaning towards democracy. (Shapiro, 2003) As such, this following paragraph will attempt to establish why Locke's majority is the best defense against tyranny.

Men are the property of God, and as such, they cannot be the property of fellow men. Furthermore, "all men by nature are equal" (Locke, 2003, p. 122) - since God granted the world to mankind in common, the view that some men are predestined by God to have an inherent right to property and monarchy by the virtue of having

descended from Adam is false, according to Locke. As such, Locke argues that the sovereign must adhere to natural laws and liberties. If such a sovereign becomes tyrannical, by violating these natural laws and properties, he is dethroned - and such, political and popular resistance is both necessary and justified. The rights of the people are protected by the sovereign, otherwise the sovereign ceases to exist. The private judgement of the people is necessary for the sovereign to continue their rule, and if the laws or actions of the sovereign do not adhere to the trust of the public, the public are allowed to take to arms.(Locke, 2003) Even further, Locke believes that the judge who decides whether or not the rights have been broken are yet again, the people: "the proper umpire, in such a case, should be the body of the people." (Locke, 2003, p. 208)This is how Locke defends the removal of James II during the Glorious Revolution: "James had, in Locke's view gone into a direct state of war with the people."(Shapiro, 2003, p. 324) However, Locke argues that the mere threat of rebellion by the populace is enough to discourage any sovereign from becoming tyrannical. If then, the sovereign still becomes tyrannical, Locke has a simple answer: the people must "appeal to Heaven"(Locke, 2003, p. 175) - God will judge who is in the right, either on the battlefield via a revolution, or perhaps a divine intervention. As such, Locke defends the right to rebel, and as such, the will of the people, whether democratic or not, will lead to the deposal of a tyrannical leader. "It is "the consent of any number of Freemen capable of a majority to unite and incorporate into such a society"(Locke, 2003, p. 143) that provides the "beginning to any lawful Government in the World."(Locke, 2003, p. 143) While this seems a democratic thought, Locke argues that this majority can create an institution which will be able to exercise power - whether it be democratic, oligarchic, or monarchic. To summarize, Locke was a staunch defender of Majority rule, and that the will of the people to rebel (albeit slowly), will eventually lead to any tyrannical leader being deposed. Even further, it is allowed under God for people to rebel since they will rebel in response to their natural rights and laws being broken. For Locke, in contrast to Plato, the will of the mob is the guarantee against tyranny.

Locke being an advocate of the enlightened despot is clear to see. Him favoring a system in which "the legislative power contain an assembly of elected representatives"(Tuckness, 2020) is due to them acting as safeguards for the liberty

and property of the people. As the power is with the people, and not the sovereign, Locke as a defense of democratic elements in any constitution is legible.

Karl Marx

Karl Marx was born in 1818, studying at several universities, including Bonn and Berlin. Maturing alongside the industrial revolution in Germany, living alongside the development of the Ruhr Valley, Marx saw “Modern industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist.”(Marx & Engels, 2012, p.80) No longer is society feudal, as earlier, but the industrial revolution has paved the way for the dominance of a new class - the bourgeoisie. Karl Marx himself was editor of a newspaper, the Rheinische Zeitung, before the Prussian Government shut it down. Following this, Marx moves to Paris, attempting to build a Franco-German newspaper. However, this would be a short stop. Due to the Prussians pressuring the French Government, Marx is yet again exiled - this time to Brussels. Here he would remain until the revolutions of 1848, a wave of liberal revolutions all through Europe. Allegedly funding revolutionaries, Marx is arrested and forced to move to London, where he would spend the remainder of his life. (Feuer & McLellan, 2022)

Marx or Engels never explicitly use the word tyranny in their Communist Manifesto, it must be interpreted through their analysis of the ruling class. “The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.(Marx & Engels, 2012, p. 76)” The bourgeoisie alienate and exploit the labor of the laborers, who “live only so long as they find work, and who find work only as long as their labor increases capital.”(Marx & Engels, 2012, p. 79) They are a commodity, and as such, they are subject to the whims of the free market. He is alienated from his work, only a cog in an immense machine. He is a slave of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois state. Every single link in the society is an exploitation of the laborer - from the landlord to the shopkeepers. Having established the tyranny of the bourgeoisie in the contemporary modern society, Marx and Engels then describe how this exploitation will be overturned “The proletarian movement is the self-conscious independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.”(Marx & Engels, 2012, p.83) Here, Marx invokes the ideas(and the words) of Locke, in that the majority is obliged and allowed to revolt against the

ruling sovereign who have broken the natural laws - in the eyes of Marx, the bourgeoisie is the actual sovereign of the modern state. Marx also rebukes Locke, however, in saying that all previous historical movements of minorities or in the interest of minorities. Only the proletariat forms the true majority. The next question to answer is what this interest of the masses will lead to. According to Marx, when the proletariat establishes itself as the ruling class, it will nationalize the means of production, infringe on the rights of property, abolish inheritance, and confiscate the property of all emigrants and rebels. Going by Plato's road to tyranny, the comparison is easy to make - tyranny is necessary for communism to succeed, and according to Marx, unavoidable. This will lead to the abolishment of classes entirely since there will be no property, and thusly, there can be no class difference - which in turn leads to the proletariat having "abolished its own supremacy as a class." (Marx & Engels, 2012) To get to this point, Marx and Engels broke with Locke and his ideas of liberty and property: "Marx and Engels endorsed the use of revolutionary violence in appropriating the wealth of the bourgeoisie and counter the almost inevitable reality of counterrevolution." (Bronner, 2012, 153) The tyranny of the majority of proletariats is necessary in order to secure a free, classless society. As such, it can be argued that democracy in any other form than communism will lead to tyranny - since it is necessary for ushering in the new world order. However, the true democracy resulting from the communist revolutions will of course be non-tyrannical since the idea of a ruling class is abolished. As Engels writes, "The first, fundamental condition for the introduction of community of property is the political liberation of the proletariat through a democratic constitution." (Marx & Engels, 2012, p.50), and once democracy is established, the first measure will be: "Guaranteeing the subsistence of the proletariat. (Marx & Engels, 2012)" In the eyes of Marx and Engels, the only way to escape the tyranny and exploitation of the bourgeoisie is through a communistic revolution and introducing proletariat democracy. As such, any other government allows for the alienation and exploitation of the proletariat, and as such, can be argued to be tyrannical. This is a strange scenario, when discussing tyranny, as clearly, the way the communist revolution will happen is inherently tyrannical. Furthermore, the idea of this democracy is not a liberal, representative democracy: it is a democracy in which all its citizens are equal, and there is no distinction of class. Only then will the democracy be non-tyrannical.

Francis Fukuyama

Francis Fukuyama was born in 1952 in the US. He studied at Cornell and Harvard, and afterwards worked at the US State Department, Fukuyama saw the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union as a whole. Seeing the fall of strong dictatorships across the globe, he wrote his article “The End of History?” in 1989, following it up with the work “The End of History and the Last Man.” In 1992. Fukuyama is arguably the only thinker in this assignment to have seen democracy as we know it today, and his view of democracy is informed by the spread of liberal democracies across the globe.(Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2022)

Francis Fukuyama argues that “liberal democracy may constitute the “end point of mankind’s ideological evolution”, and the final form of human government.”(Fukuyama, 1992, p. xi) He elaborates that injustice and social problems arising in democracies are due to incomplete implementation of the principles of democracy and liberty. As such, the Holocaust “was both a unique evil and the product of historically unique circumstances that converged in Germany... These conditions [...] would be very hard to duplicate in other societies in the future.” (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 129) He goes even further and argues that Nazism could be understood as a “disease of the transition” (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 129), and not a component of modernity. From this point of view, democracy does not lead to tyranny - tyranny leads to democracy. Using the examples of former dictatorships and communist states, Fukuyama argues that they wanted to ensure rights - no arbitrary arrests, better living conditions and so on. Yet, he argues that even in prosperous autocracies such as Taiwan or Spain, the citizens wanted freedom - not just economic prosperity. “Free government exercises a positive pull of its own:” (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 144). Furthermore, Fukuyama presents three arguments as to why economic developments produce liberal democracies:

- Democracy is the only form of government able to mediate the complex web of conflicting interests created by a modern economy

The modern economies depend on the willingness of its participants to work together - if they have no trust in their system/sovereign, the economy will not function smoothly.

- Decay of authoritarian regimes due to power struggles and the death of the original charismatic founder(s) of the regimes

Out of tyranny and dictatorships comes a compromise between elite groups - who agree to share power as a “second-best outcome.” As such, democracy is a byproduct of elite struggle.

- Successful industrialization produces middle-class societies, and these demand political participation and rights

Industrialization calls for an educated workforce, and according to Fukuyama, “the link between education and liberal democracy has been frequently noted, and would seem to be an all-important one.” (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 129))

While Fukuyama does not explicitly state whether democracies lead to tyranny, he does infer that the opposite is true - tyranny leads to democracy. Just as Locke and Marx before him, Fukuyama calls on the people of the countries to overthrow their masters. Yet, unlike them, Fukuyama explicitly states Liberal Democracy as the as of now ideal government. Attempts to deny or counteract this mechanism of economic developments towards a Liberal Democracy were shown by Germany and Japan in the second world war, and are possible - but they were misinformed, thinking that their Lebensraum would ensure economic security, when in fact, the war secured the destruction of the same security. “...it is questionable whether the world as a whole can make such a rupture for any extended length of time.(Fukuyama, 1992, p.336)” In this era, liberal democracies are the default and the logical path for any nation to come to. As such, even in the cases of tyranny mentioned, the reasons for this are not inherent to democracy - but are time-limited and even unique, in the case of the Holocaust. Liberal democracy does not lead to tyranny, yet if other factors lead a democracy to tyranny, the will of the general populace will bring it back to liberal democracy.

Discussion

All four thinkers insist on the power of the majority. However, the meaning and value of the majority has changed. From Plato’s unthinking and selfish mob to Locke’s majority who is independent and free under God, the idea of the majority has moved from ensuring tyranny to being the foremost weapon against it. Marx

then twists the idea of the majority in that it does not have the power that Locke and Plato gives it - but it should. Here, the power does not lay with the people, as it does with Locke, but with the capital and the bourgeoisie. As such, tyranny is inevitable as long as the proletariat is not in power - we have nothing to lose but our chains. Moving on to Fukuyama, once again, the majority has the power - whether it's the middle class, citizens or simply people dependent on the economy. Here, the sheer allure of liberal democracy is enough to convince the majority to seek it, either through immigration, calls for change or outright rebellion. As their idea of majority differ, so does their idea of tyranny. Plato believes tyranny to be an inevitable conclusion to democracy, whereas Locke believes that going against the majority is tyranny. Marx believes all states are exploitative and therefore tyrannical, yet his idea of removing the bourgeoisie is not without tyranny itself. However, once the class-free, true democracy has been established, tyranny is no more. Fukuyama reverses the assumption and establishes that tyranny leads to democracy - breaking with the tradition of the others, yet in the spirit of Locke, where the right to revolt is established. The three thinkers following Plato agree on the power resting with the people.

Conclusion

This assignment has examined four thinkers and their thoughts about tyranny and democracy. Starting in the antiquity with Plato, going into the Enlightenment with Locke, heading into the 19th century with Marx, and finishing in the 20th-21st centuries with Fukuyama, the assignment has proposed four different ideas to whether democracy leads to tyranny. It has found that Plato advocated against democracy because mob rule would always lead to tyranny. The assignment has found that Locke, while not a democrat, has argued that tyranny cannot exist, since the people would revolt against it, laying the foundations for liberalism. Furthermore, it has shown that Marx believed all current governments were tyrannical, since they were the tools of the bourgeoisie. However, after a quick period of tyranny, the true democracy would be established, and in the classless society, there would be no reason for tyranny since there would be no ruling class. Lastly, it has examined a contemporary thinker in Fukuyama, establishing that liberal democracy is the endpoint for human civilization, and therefore, is the government people across the globe strive for. While short lapses of dictatorships and tyrannical

regimes can exist, they will always be heading towards liberal democracy: tyranny leads to democracy. The assignment has shown how the nature of the majority has transformed from an unruly, selfish mob into a thinking, rational and protected citizenship. Democracy has changed from being the worst people governing, to being the way to safeguard against tyrants and bad sovereigns. While the meaning of democracy is disputed between the thinkers following Plato, they believe democracy to be the guarantee of freedom from tyrants. Following this assignment, a topic for more research would be a more in-depth comparison between the attitude towards the nature of man and the attitude towards democracy - as man thinks himself more rational, does democracy become more popular?

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