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VALUES OF DEMOCRACY AS ASSETS TO POLITICAL STABILITY

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INTRODUCTION

The current political development in world politics suggests unequivocally that 'democracy' as a political system is succeeding and hence overshadowing its long time counterpart; namely, 'communism'. While there are bases upon which 'democracy' and 'communism' compare, the ideals of the latter are losing grounds to the ideals of the former. The successes of democracy as a system of government have always been connected with the understanding that it admits variety and permits criticism. The current rejection of communism and its collapse as a system of government are pointers to the fact that it lacks such ideals which are intended to secure maximum liberty for citizens. The craze for liberty and equality by people, which are distinctive aims of democracy helps to encourage the feeling of the skeptic that communism will not recover from its present predicament. In any case, this prediction has little to do with our objective in this essay.

Our basic objective in this paper is to identify the ideals of democracy and argue that these ideals help political stability. The work is divided into three principal sections: the nature of democracy where the ideals of democracy can be identified, then look into the concept of political stability, and finally a show of how these ideals enhance political stability.

If ever there is any justification at all for this paper, it must be because it accounts for the political understanding of the ideals of democracy. The struggle for democracy at any cost and the engendering irritation for communism justify the opinion that it is the political elements that are embedded in the ideals of

democracy that attract the attention of people. The fathers of democratic doctrine¹ seemed to have been overwhelmed with the political ideals that democracy was meant to represent that they did not substantiate how these ideals contribute to political stability. It is this important issue that this paper is designed to address.

The Nature of Democracy

The ideals that democracy as a political system consists of form the background to its nature and definition. This point is not even assumed in the etymological meaning of democracy. The word democracy comes from two Greek words; namely "demos", "Kratei." These two words combine to mean 'the rule of the people' or "the people's rule". This understanding had practice in what was originally conceived as 'Athenian democracy' in which foreigners, women, children and slaves were excluded from being part of the scheme of things. The 'people' referred to consisted of the adult free males of indigenous status². Certainly, the Athenian notion and practice of democracy seems not to represent the pure concept of democracy, nevertheless, it still takes seriously the view that the people as a body are possessed of the decision to choose those that should rule over them. The people in this context are possessed of the supreme power. The description points to democracy at work. It is reasonable to suggest that the Athenian form of democracy does not ignore the restoration of power in the people, those exempted notwithstanding. However, the question still remains: who are the people?

Besides, in the development of the democratic tradition, the exceptions such as we see in the Athenian democracy has been steadily overcome by way of absorption. The fundamental principles of democracy, in the modern trend, preserve certain constant political annotations which include the acceptance of the majority rule accompanied with respect for the rights of the minority. This also includes the protection of the rights of citizenship. The sort of stages that the democratic tradition has passed through does not relegate any of these values to the background.

The different definitions that have been put forward by political thinkers clearly harmonize these values. For example, Mill defines democracy as the government of the whole people by the whole

people in which the majority will outvote and prevail³. Some more recent writers build their whole idea of democracy on the strength of this background. For example, Honderich defines democracy as "a practice in which the people choose and then influence those who do govern the nation and direct its relations of war and peace"⁴. Honderich's definition also has a meeting point with Schumpeter's classical doctrine of democracy. He defines democracy as a method or an "institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will"⁵.

There are no differences between these definitions. Rather, it is easy to identify the mutuality that exists between them. It is out of this mutuality that we can see clearly the true nature of democracy as a political system. We shall not, as those who read with care will have appreciated, engage in propounding a definition of our own. There is simply no case for saying that there is something inherently objectionable in these definitions. There are two major factors that combine to make democracy a unique political system; first, the common good and the will of the people and second, competition for political leadership. These definitions address these two major factors and there is no need to duplicate efforts here by contemplating another definition of democracy. Far more important in this work is determining from these factors together with the definitions the nature of democracy.

What has been said in the definition of democracy brings to view three important highlights of its nature. These are: liberty, freedom and equality. They are values that fully represent the nature of democracy and they are not new in political thinking with respect to democracy.

Liberty is understood from two major perspectives in political thinking; namely, negative and positive forms of liberty. The negative form has interpretation in the duties of a person to abstain from interfering in the activities of others. The negative sense is understood within the context that one does not act to obstruct the activities of others. Therefore the negative sense in the understanding of liberty derives from the restraint placed on someone as a result of the assumed wish of another person to be

his own master. The positive sense differs from the notion of restraint; rather, it derives from "the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master"⁶.

The combination of both senses balance quite accurately the complete meaning of liberty: that liberty is a safeguard against the duties of individuals from conflicting with the rights of others. Therefore liberty ascertains for the individual privilege of choice, and of action. No pariah in democratic liberty because status and influence do not count against anyone in the exercise of democratic will. From these we can sum up by saying that liberty translates into the different areas in which the individual is power unto himself. Consequent upon this, no one is mortgaged out of the wider controlling power vested in the entire aggregate of the community. We shall examine below how this position retains the status of the value of democracy and how it helps to sustain our concept of political stability.

The idea of freedom in democratic tradition slightly differs from that of liberty. This slight difference does not obscure the fact that "freedom" and "liberty" are twin brothers in political thinking, each fighting for the same goal but distinct in approach. There can be no doubt that freedom connotes absence of constraint while the idea of liberty in the same vein stresses the value of freedom in the exercise of liberty. In spite of this intermixture in meaning between the two ideals, they are slightly different from each other in that liberty is behaving according to rules, while freedom is respecting others rights.

The notion of liberty derives from the recognition of the duties of person to person. These duties, in their different forms, formulate the basis of rules. Liberty, as a concept, exists at the instance of rules and it is in rules that the nature of liberty is determined. Freedom differs in this singular respect in the sense that the freedom that the individual has is determined by his entitlements by right. The rights one has, and not the duties of others, determine the extent of one's freedom. Rules, as it were, are not relevant to the notion of freedom because it is not in the duties of others to one that the extent of one's freedom is determined. More of these views will show below as we progress.

Our purpose presently, is to discuss the issue of the significance of freedom as part of the nature of democracy. Central to the

general feeling of people, freedom is highly valued because it negates restrictions and interferences except those voluntarily imposed on oneself. This central feeling ideally promises the unrestrained option to choose what one wants but with the limitations that give honour to others and to the common good. Since democratic practice does not claim inerrancy, the limitations placed on freedom permit criticisms that cautiously identify weaknesses in policy making. As Forester puts it, freedom in the democratic tradition is 'openness to nurture truth' against falsehood'. These points are intimately bound up with the nature of democracy and remain as necessary conditions to keep the tradition adaptable to modernity.

Now before we return to the issue of what is to be said on the concept of political stability, there is need to highlight equality as one of the elements in the nature of democracy. Equality has also been given different interpretations in the philosophical circle. Some have suggested that equality and liberty involve each other and cannot be separated. The account we give of liberty as 'behaving according to rules' makes the idea of equality separable from liberty. Equality as conceived in the democratic framework is the recognition of the equal value of persons. Therefore, while liberty is behaving according to rules, equality is behaving according to personal rights which are at par with others' rights. Given the overwhelming natural differences or inequalities between men in terms of status, wealth and in various other ways, such differences in this context do not put into dispute the equal value of the existence of say: the mother and her infant child.

The explicit ideological motive behind equality in democracy attempts to put no value on the inequalities that arise from degree of potentialities and of accomplishments. This view can be explained in a number of ways. For example, the exercise of *laissez faire* right in democracy recognizes the voting cards as having equal merits. None represents the card of the impoverished as distinct from that of the rich and affluent. Voting cards from both sets of people count equally. It is, therefore, pertinent in the democratic framework to recognize the ideal that appreciates humanity on equal terms. Democracy, as a political system, offers it.

Now if we carefully look into our analyses so far, it looks clear that democracy is an outstanding political system on three

grounds; namely, it admits variety, it permits criticism and it neutralises political pride. The extent to which these are true will show clearly when we examine the ways in which democracy influences the political stability of a nation. Meanwhile we shall look into the concept of political stability.

The Concept of Political Stability

The concept of political stability is ordinarily construed as the absence of patterns of reactions that put political leadership in some precarious circumstance. Though this may stand in for the meaning of the concept, in fact such an understanding is quite narrow. Moreover, it fails to take into proper view the very foundation upon which the concept of political stability is built.

One objective of a well-ordered nation is to preserve and strengthen the political institution. This is not only necessary for the purpose of making governance possible but also making it possible in circumstances that are non compliant to chaos. Rawls speaking about stability in general says:

... the scheme of social cooperation must be stable: it must be more or less regularly complied with and its basic rules willingly acted upon; and when infractions occur, stabilizing forces should exist that prevent further violations and tend to restore the arrangement⁸

The kind of views Rawls expresses here presuppose an already existing patterned political stability and the general point illustrated in the views is aimed at suggesting what steps to take in order to restore stability in a nation. These views have not addressed the background concept of political stability. However, there seems to be no meaningful sense in which political stability could be conceived independently of elements that frustrate political infractions.

This point shall be subjected to further analysis below. The consistent participation of people in one unified political system, creates connecting cords or links between the people. Such cords or links elicit a formalized political culture: the cords or links are in

terms of the uniformity in political participation. The articulation of a political culture consists in the way in which people that belong to one common political arrangement answer political questions in some patterns that are individually reasoned out but yielding corporate interests. For example, a nation may have five political parties and the voting behaviour of the people marks out two of them to be dominant while others remain appendages. This voting behaviour, in the end, forms a pattern that reflects the political will of the people.

Consistent with this is the constitutional convention characterized by expectations. Such expectations are an inbuilt agenda which include the phenomenon of time limit in which certain political plans are to be carried out. For example, election procedures in which the power that resides in the electorate is allowed to rate the standards of those who seek political leadership or office. When the people are acculturated with certain political expectations everyone of them will be more conscious of the fact that everyone counts in political activities. When these considerations are most over-whelmingly present in political practice, everybody is seen working towards protecting the central conventional political wisdom, and that becomes a culture because it is the practice.

Under such a political awareness, the concept of political stability is rooted in an established political culture that provides political expectations or maps that shed light on cases of conventional political behaviour as distinct from erratic political behaviour. The concept of political stability, therefore, is the absence of erratic political behaviour and the willingness to participate in a pre-planned conflict-free political wisdom and expediency. The emergence and persistence of a political culture in a society prepares the ground for a lasting political stability. To justify this position, we shall proceed to examine the sense in which the values of democracy are assets to the political stability of a nation.

Analyses of the Values of Democracy on Political Stability

So far, we have got the idea of political stability. Before then, we had identified equality, liberty and freedom as values of democracy. We shall analyse each of these in the sequence we put them above

in order to establish our position. On equality, it is supposed, that some real assurances of equality lies in the criteria upon which the principles of justice are mounted. This account of the ground for equality is far more diluted than that favoured by democratic principles.

When these criteria are drawn into cases of equality, differences that have been influenced by differing life chances make the unequal treatment of people look equal. We are then faced with the renewed question of whether all peoples are in fact equal. However, it does seem that the tendency in this direction has some degree of naturalness. Rather than being associated with this kind of naturalness, equality in democracy treats all human beings alike in considerations that lead to corporate interests. For example, in the *laissez faire* principles in the exercise of democratic rights, no one is discriminated against on grounds of status, influence or wealth. It is worthwhile to note that each vote, irrespective of who casts it, counts equally. This basic notion provides the formula under which all men think about themselves as equal in democracy and the account of all factors that create differences between people are eschewed.

It is much easier to show that equality has political significance than to make reference to this singular basic implication. The key political point present in this basic notion is that the defence of equality in democracy places all persons on the same pedestal giving them equitable respect and honour. It does, in this sense, avoid intimidation and suppression. It restores the sense of belonging to the affairs of the society. This is, in our opinion, the political ideal that equality as a value of democracy fosters in the principle of democracy.

The other value of democracy which also has political explanation is liberty. The concept of liberty as we have highlighted above is a pointer to some forms of victory in political tradition. Certainly such identified victories do explain liberty as a value to democracy. Rawls' description of liberty provides another careful laid out interpretation. He says that, "the general description of liberty ... has the following form: this or that person (or persons) is free (or not free) from this or that constraint (or set of constraints) to do (or not to do) so and so"¹⁹.

The main consequence that Rawls' description has is that it shows that liberty is a combination of what one is free and not free to do. The point is that liberty connotes the extent to which we are free, and the extent to which we are not free in the light of some rules. In a wider understanding, the reflective considerations of liberty can be explained when we examine the sense in which one is at the same time free and not free. This point looks conflicting but it is in it that liberty has meaning. If a rough description is worthwhile, let us think about this in simple logic: that what is positive cannot at the same time be negative. As the logician would say a statement is meaningful when it is either true or false, but not both true and false.

The position of logic is right and we must also accept that the position of the principle of liberty is also right. This is because the principle of liberty acknowledges 'not doing' as essentially 'doing' and on this account does not deviate from the point of view of the logician. The description that explains this position in the explanation of liberty is that we have the option to choose while our options do not constrain the options of others to choose. Furthermore that our options to choose confirm our worth in the society while our options not to choose confirm the worth of others in the society. This consideration highlights the inherent values that democracy, as a political system, places on individuals represented in the society. It is worth remarking in this connection that in democracy, there is the commitment to see every one as having some values which together constitute the worth of the society. The extent to which democracy is maintained in the society is the extent to which the placing of values on everyone is pursued.

The last of the aspects which makes democracy attractive is freedom. It is best to begin from a conception of freedom that has been central to the political theorists. According to this conception:

Freedom refers primarily to a condition characterized by the absence of coercion or constraint imposed by another person; a man is said to be free to the extent that he can choose his own goals or course of conduct, can choose between alternatives available to him, and is not compelled to act as he would not

*himself choose to act ... by the will of another man ... or of any other authority*¹⁰.

The ideals expressed in this reference are central to what freedom generally means from whatever perspective it is examined. Even the critics¹¹ of freedom do not deny that the good in freedom benefits them. Their arguments focus on the burdens that freedom elicits because of the elastic privileges that it gives¹². This may be seen as simplistic way of interpreting their views; nevertheless, their arguments are not opposed to the reality that freedom connotes absence of obstructions to the realization of desire.

The idea present in political freedom is articulated in the content of the opportunity to participate in the process of collective choice just like anybody else. Since this notion deals with defined participation, freedom in the political sense is not unlimited. Its limitation marks the point where the freedom of others begins. If one regards this point as characteristic of freedom, it is then grounded on the proposition that each person is unconstrained to desire for goals that do not put constraints on the desires of others.

It is to this extent, in our own opinion, that the explanations of freedom in democracy can be expressed. The understanding of freedom in the context we are treating it connotes the ideas that everyone is responsible for his decisions and this responsibility includes showing regard for the responsibility of others. This position does not only place values on others, but beyond this point is the political fact that everyone counts in the society. The responsibility of placing values on others is a responsibility because it is unselfish since the interests of others are put into consideration. This unavoidable vigilance makes freedom an asset both in practical and theoretical considerations of politics. With the analyses we have given to each of these values, we shall proceed to identifying the areas in which these democratic values are assets to political stability.

As we turn to this aspect of the essay, it is important that we highlight the sense in which the word 'asset' is to be comprehended. The common way 'asset' is often understood is from the accounting notion of it: that an asset is often some piece of

property and claims seen balanced against liabilities. This consideration may look as exclusively useful for accounting since the term seems reserved for this area of human knowledge. Though there is some merit in our opinion here we cannot avoid looking at property as some form of valuable that is useful for the owner. For these same reasons property remains an asset.

This is where our use of the word has the meaning we want it to have in this work. We intend to understand 'asset' as the ways in which democratic values are of some advantages or of some usefulness in guaranteeing political stability, consistency or steadiness.

Now with this notion of 'asset' in the background, we shall identify two significant reasons why democratic values are assets to political stability. We must begin by bringing to focus the democratic values already identified which were: equality, liberty and freedom. These values are virtues that give special characteristics to democracy as a political system. These are values that endorse all persons represented in the democratic society as political participants. The combination of these values grants people some sense of responsibility and the feeling that they are contributive to the management and running of government and that they take no interest in doing anything inimical to the stability of government. With this goal in mind, any action that aims at destabilizing the very political set-up in which one contributed to setting up is contradictory. The avoidance of this contradiction enhances political stability.

The other point has some links with the persistent assurances that the exercising of these values are well defined in the political agenda inherent in the democratic constitution. This agenda includes clear plans at intervals between election years and the procedures that are designed to make the exercise successful. The presence of constitutional agenda deprives dictatorial tendencies and makes possible two substantial developments. First, it makes changes possible in the leadership class, and second, it helps leadership to acknowledge the people as the source of political power.

What we have said so far point to the view that these democratic values guarantee a collective choice procedure which is a political mechanism for transforming the separate wills of some set of people into a decision which represents a united will. This collective procedure apparently confers on everyone the obligation to express one's wish in the political running of the society.

The argument, therefore, is that since the constitutional agenda confer on the people the enabling power to express their liberty, freedom and exercise of equality at specified intervals, a political culture is bound to arise. Furthermore, such a structure appears to leave ample room for all to work towards stabilizing this political culture since all are responsible for corporate decisions.

The logic here is that if (as a member of) a society adopts a political system that perpetuates class equality, guarantees, through definition, my freedom and safeguards my liberty, then I know that I am somebody in the society. Since this feeling is neither restrictive nor discriminatory in a democracy, the collective will to maintain this status quo becomes paramount among the people. It is through this collective will that political stability is achieved. This collective will is incompatible with discriminatory tendencies, selfish and sectional interests. Democracy fails in practice when this collective will is confronted by these vices. Apparently, all are challenged to impose, as a matter of political common sense, constraints on the callousness of the enemies of the system. It seems reasonable to settle on this argument as one of the ways in which values of democracy remain assets to political stability. The two arguments we have advanced here may not represent the only ways in which values of democracy enhance political stability, rather they are two of the ways through which substantive persuasion is possible.

Conclusion

Our determination in this paper is not designed to show that political theorists and indeed the fathers of democracy were unconscious of the importance of the value of democracy. Rather, it is aimed at establishing some of the ways by which such values enhance political stability. It may well be that the yearning for democracy in the communist world is tied to notions that have some worth in the arguments that we have advanced here.

Our presentation of the worth of equality, liberty and freedom combine to make many discussions on democracy interestingly puzzling to comprehend. Perhaps, the unrelenting willingness of many to risk life for the desire for democracy is predicated on some of the reasons we have highlighted here. Democracy is winning.

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