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Eng. 101

Essay 5

4/17/05 Aristotle: Democracy, Oligarchy,  
or Huge Mess; You Make the Call

Aristotle, in his book, *the Politics*, asks the question of who should be the rulers of the state: “There is also a doubt as to what is to be the supreme ruler of the state” (para. 5). Aristotle believes that democracy should reign supreme, but not before he goes through the other possibilities as well and dismisses them.

First, Aristotle it seems, fears the majority ruling (the poor) because if they get in power they may get greedy and destroy the state from within. Aristotle says

If the poor for example divide the property of the rich--is this not unjust? ...Again, in the first division, all has been taken and the majority has divided anew the property of the minority, is it not evident, that if this goes on, that they will ruin the state?

(para.5)

The oligarchy type of government doesn't get rave reviews either from Aristotle. He asks: "But, should the few and the wealthy be the rulers"? (para.5) He

dismisses this type of government with the same argument. Aristotle states:

And what if they, in like manner, rob and plunder the people—is this just?

If so, the other case likewise would be just. But there can be no doubt that all these things are wrong and unjust. (para.5)

Aristotle then goes even further when he asks:

Then ought the good to rule and have supreme power? But in that case,

everybody else, being excluded from power will be dishonoured. (para.6)

Even further still Aristotle tightens his grip on the con side of the term oligarchy.

He asks:

Then will it be well that the one best man should rule? Nay, that is still more oligarchical, for the number of those who are dishonoured is thereby increased. (para.6)

Aristotle really thinks that democracy is best even with some difficulties. In a

nutshell, he says that no form of government is perfect but democracy is the best one because everyone has a piece of the action.

Aristotle states:

The principle that the multitude ought to be supreme rather than the few best is one that is maintained, and, though not free from difficulty, yet seems to have an element of truth. For the many, of whom each individual is but an ordinary person, when they meet together may very

likely better than the few good, if regarded not individually but collectively, just as a feast to which many contribute is better than that of a dinner provided by a single purse.

For each individual among the many has a share of virtue and prudence, and when they meet together, they become in a manner one man, who has many feet, and hands, and senses; that is a figure of their mind and disposition. Hence, the many

are better judges than a single man of music and poetry; for some understand one part, and some understand another, and among them they understand the whole. (para.7)

As one can see, Aristotle clearly picks democracy over oligarchy, or probably any other kind of government. Democracy means that everyone in a certain country, at least in modern times has a voice. Back in Aristotle's day, even a democracy didn't give everyone a voice because slaves and

women didn't have any say in government.

Even if we are freer than that, we still have our share of problems in the United States.

There is a question whether the founding principle of democracy remains, or can we possibly be an oligarchy. I think that the United States is right in the middle between a democracy and an oligarchy. We have democratic rights, but are being made to have very few choices when it comes to politicians. The politicians we do get seem to be already very rich, so they have more

money than the common man to run for election with. This makes it hard for common folk who don't have much to run.

So, in short, we are some of both a democracy and an oligarchy. Reality is not distorted when this question is asked because the United States could very well be turning into an oligarchy, which never was intended in the first place.

Just a few things need to change in order for the United States to become a total oligarchy. However, some of these things

probably will never happen, but who knows? First, what if we became a total one-party system? That would lessen our choices even more; it would turn this country's ideals into one agenda only, and chaos would reign. The analysis of the situation might read something like this: if the Republicans had the only party, then social programs would be seriously compromised and the U.S. might turn war-like. If the Democrats had the only party, then we would have our social programs, but

would have little in military defense, perhaps. This could make us more vulnerable to attacks.

Second, we might turn into a true oligarchy if we somehow couldn't raise money for a campaign run for the common man. It seems like there are ways of raising money now. Perhaps government grants (if they exist for this purpose), or the internet with its non-party specific activists on-line can help this situation.

However, perhaps the best way for the common man to get a high office (President), is to start with trying to get a smaller office (Congressman) by having a good strong work ethic and a well-studied knowledge about politics and policy. In the ideal world, and yes the U.S., we would be trying to work for the common good, not pushing our own agenda, or bowing to a donation-heavy lobbyist. This also contributes to becoming a true oligarchy, because this lobbyist wants its own agenda

fulfilled, instead of maybe looking for the common good. The lobby in this case may be greedy or even crooked. However, without their money, it is hard to get elected. It seems like it's a game of be honest or get elected.

In conclusion, Aristotle teaches some valuable truths about what is right in government. If only a few hold power in government, the rich and the wealthy (which seems to be the case today), then the rest of us may need to step up and speak, or

perhaps turn this wonderful country into something that wasn't intended. Perhaps we need to change a law that would give more help to people who would like to run for office somewhere, but just can't afford it.

What if a person with an income of \$10,000 or less a year wants to run? Shouldn't there be a government program out there specifically targeted to help this group of people to a certain extent at least? It's a great and free country. Let's not turn it into something that wasn't intended. We don't

want a country based on the exact opposite of who we are: with liberty and justice for none. I, like Aristotle, think an oligarchy is unjust and not very free. We need to keep ourselves a democracy.