Democracy Revisited:
The Ancients and the Moderns

Alain de Benoist

"The defenders of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy," wrote George Orwell.[1] This does not seem to be a recent phenomenon. Guizot remarked in 1849: "So powerful is the sway of the word democracy, that no government and no party dares to live, or thinks it can, without inscribing this word on its banner."[2] This is truer today than ever before. Not everybody is a democrat, but everybody pretends to be one. There is no dictatorship that does not regard itself as a democracy. The former communist countries of Eastern Europe did not merely represent themselves as democratic, as attested by their constitutions;[3] they vaunted themselves as the only real democracies, in contrast to the "formal" democracies of the West.

The near unanimity on democracy as a word, albeit not always a fact, gives the notion of democracy a moral and almost religious content, which, from the very outset, discourages further discussion. Many authors have recognized this problem. Thus, in 1939, T.S. Eliot declared: "When a word acquires a universally sacred character . . . , as has today the word democracy, I begin to wonder, whether, by all it attempts to mean, it still means anything at all."[4] Bertrand de Jouvenel was even more explicit: "The discussion on democracy, the arguments in its favor, or against it, point frequently to a degree of intellectual shallowness, because it is not quite clear what this discussion is all about."[5] Giovanni Sartori added in 1962: "In a somewhat paradoxical vein, democracy could be defined as a high-flown name for something which does not exist."[6] Julien Freund also noted, in a somewhat witty tone:

> To claim to be a democrat means little, because one can be a democrat in a contradictory manner either in the manner of the Americans or the English, or like the East European communists, Congolese, or Cubans. It is perfectly natural that under such circumstances I refuse to be a democrat, because my neighbor might be an adherent of dictatorship while invoking the word democracy.[7]

Thus we can see that the universal propagation of the term democracy does not contribute much to clarifying the meaning of democracy. Undoubtedly, we need to go a step further.

The first idea that needs to be dismissed—an idea still cherished by some—is that democracy is a specific product of the modern era, and that democracy corresponds to a "developed stage" in the history of political regimes.[8] This does not seem to be substantiated by the facts. Democracy is neither more "modern" nor more "evolved" than other forms of governance. Governments with

democratic tendencies have appeared throughout history. We note that the linear perspective used in this type of analysis can be particularly deceiving. The idea of progress, when applied to a political regime, appears devoid of meaning. If one subscribes to this type of linear reasoning, it is easy to advance the argument of the "self-evidence" of democracy, which, according to liberals, arises "spontaneously" in the realm of political affairs just as the market "spontaneously" accords with the logic of demand and supply. Jean Baechler notes:

> If we accept the hypothesis that men, as an animal species(*sic*), aspire spontaneously to a democratic regime which promises them security, prosperity, and liberty, we must then also conclude that, the minute these requirements have been met, the democratic experience automatically emerges, without ever needing the framework of ideas.[9]

What exactly are these "requirements" that produce democracy, in the same manner as fire causes heat? They bear closer examination.

In contrast to the Orient, absolute despotism has always been rare in Europe. Whether in ancient Rome, or in Homer's Iliad, Vedantic India, or among the Hittites, one can observe very early the existence of popular assemblies, both military and civilian. In Indo-European societies kings were usually elected; in fact, all ancient monarchies were first elective monarchies. Tacitus relates that among the Germans chieftains were elected on account of their valor, and kings on account of their noble birth (*reges ex nobilitate duces ex virtute sumunt*). In France, for instance, the crown was long both elective and hereditary. It was only with Pippin the Short that the king was chosen from within the same family, and only after Hugh Capet that the principle of primogeniture was adopted. In Scandinavia, the king was elected by a provincial assembly; that election had then to be confirmed by the other national assemblies.

Among the Germanic peoples the practice of "shielding"—or raising the new king on his soldiers' shields—was widespread.[10] The Holy Roman Emperor was also elected, and the importance of the role of the princely electors in the history of Germany should not be neglected. By and large, it was only with the beginning of the twelfth century in Europe that elective monarchy gradually gave way to hereditary monarchy. Until the French Revolution, kings ruled with the aid of parliaments which possessed considerable executive powers. In almost all European communities it was long the status of freeman that conferred political rights on the citizen. "Citizens" were constituent members of free popular communes, which among other things possessed their own municipal charters, and sovereign rulers were surrounded by councils in the decision-making process. Moreover, the influence of customary law on juridical practice was an index of popular "participation" in defining the laws. In short, it cannot be stated that Europe's old monarchies were devoid of popular legitimacy.

The oldest parliament in the Western world, the althing, the federal assembly of Iceland, whose members gathered yearly in the inspired setting of Thingvellir, emerged as early as 930 A.D. Adam von Bremen wrote in 1076: "They have no king, only the laws." The thing, or local parliament, designated both a location and the assembly where freemen with equal political rights convened at a fixed date in order to legislate and render justice.[11] In Iceland the freeman enjoyed two inalienable privileges: he had a right to bear arms and to a seat in the thing. "The Icelanders," writes Frederick Durand

> created and experienced what one could call by some uncertain yet suggestive analogy a kind of Nordic Hellas, i.e., a community of freemen who participated actively in the affairs of the community. Those communities were surprisingly well cultivated and intellectually productive, and, in addition, were united by bonds based on esteem and respect.[12]

"Scandinavian democracy is very old and one can trace its origins to the Viking era," observes Maurice Gravier.[13] In all of northern Europe this "democratic" tradition was anchored in a very strong communitarian sentiment, a propensity to "live together" (*zusammenleben*), which constantly fostered the primacy of the common interest over that of the individual. Such democracy, typically, included a certain hierarchical structure, which explains why one could describe it as "aristo-democracy." This tradition, based also on the concept of mutual assistance and a sense of common responsibility, remains alive in many countries today, for instance, in Switzerland.

The belief that the people were originally the possessor of power was common throughout the Middle Ages. Whereas the clergy limited itself to the proclamation *omnis potestas a Deo,* other theorists argued that power could emanate from God only through the intercession of the people. The belief of the "power of divine right" should therefore be seen in an indirect form, and not excluding the reality of the people. Thus, Marsilius of Padua did not hesitate to proclaim the concept of popular sovereignty; significantly, he did so in order to defend the supremacy of the emperor (at the time, Ludwig of Bavaria) over the Church. The idea of linking the principle of the people to its leaders was further emphasized in the formula *populus et proceres* (the people and the nobles), which appears frequently in old texts.

Here we should recall the democratic tendencies evident in ancient Rome,[14] the republics of medieval Italy, the French and Flemish communes, the Hanseatic municipalities, and the free Swiss cantons. Let us further note the ancient *boerenvrijheid* ("peasants' freedom") that prevailed in medieval Frisian provinces and whose equivalent could be found along the North Sea, in the Low Lands, in Flanders, Scandinavia, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Finally, it is worth mentioning the existence of important communal movements based on free corporate structures, the function of which was to provide mutual help and to pursue economic and political goals. Sometimes these movements clashed with king and Church, which were supported by the burgeoning

bourgeoisie. At other times, however, communal movements backed the monarchy in its fight against the feudal lords, thus contributing to the rise of the mercantile bourgeoisie.[15]

In reality, most political regimes throughout history can be qualified as mixed ones. "All ancient democracies," writes François Perroux, "were governed by a de facto or de jure aristocracy, unless they were governed by a monarchical principle."[16] According to Aristotle, Solon's constitution was oligarchic in terms of its Areopagus, aristocratic in terms of its magistrates, and democratic in terms of the make-up of its tribunals. It combined the advantages of each type of government. Similarly, Polybius argues that Rome was, in view of the power of its consuls, an elective monarchy; in regard to the powers of the Senate, an aristocracy; and regarding the rights of the people, a democracy. Cicero, in his *De Republica*, advances a similar view. Monarchy need not exclude democracy, as is shown by the example of contemporary constitutional and parliamentary monarchies today. After all, it was the French monarchy in 1789 that convoked the Estates-General. "[D]emocracy, taken in the broad sense, admits of various forms," observed Pope Pius XII, "and can be realized in monarchies as well as in republics."[17]

Let us add that the experience of modern times demonstrates that neither government nor institutions need play a decisive role in shaping social life. Comparable types of government may disguise different types of societies, whereas different governmental forms may mask identical social realities. (Western societies today have an extremely homogeneous structure even though their institutions and constitutions sometimes offer substantial differences.)

So now the task of defining democracy appears even more difficult. The etymological approach has its limits. According to its original meaning, democracy means "the power of the people." Yet this power can be interpreted in different ways. The most reasonable approach, therefore, seems to be the historical approach—an approach that explains "genuine" democracy as first of all the political system of that ancient people that simultaneously invented the word and the fact.

The notion of democracy did not appear at all in modern political thought until the eighteenth century. Even then its mention was sporadic, frequently with a pejorative connotation. Prior to the French Revolution the most "advanced" philosophers had fantasized about mixed regimes combining the advantages of an "enlightened" monarchy and popular representation. Montesquieu acknowledged that a people could have the right to control, but not the right to rule. Not a single revolutionary constitution claimed to have been inspired by "democratic" principles. Robespierre was, indeed, a rare person for that epoch, who toward the end of his reign, explicitly mentioned democracy (which did not however contribute to the strengthening of his popularity in the years to come), a regime that he defined as a representative

form of government, i.e., "a state in which the sovereign people, guided by laws which are of their own making, do for themselves all that they can do well, and by their delegates do all that they cannot do themselves." [18]

It was in the United States that the word democracy first became widespread, notably when the notion of "republic" was contrasted to the notion of "democracy." Its usage became current at the beginning of the nineteenth century, especially with the advent of Jacksonian democracy and the subsequent establishment of the Democratic Party. The word, in turn, crossed the Atlantic again and became firmly implanted in Europe—to the profit of the constitutional debates that filled the first half of the nineteenth century. Tocqueville's book *Democracy in America*, the success of which was considerable, made the term a household word.

Despite numerous citations, inspired by antiquity, that adorned the philosophical and political discourse of the eighteenth century, the genuine legacy drawn from ancient democracy was at that time very weak. The philosophers seemed more enthralled with the example of Sparta than Athens. The debate "Sparta vs. Athens," frequently distorted by bias or ignorance, pitted the partisans of authoritarian egalitarianism against the tenets of moderate liberalism.[19] Rousseau, for instance, who abominated Athens, expressed sentiments that were rigorously pro-Spartiate. In his eyes, Sparta was first and foremost the city of equals (*hómoioi*). By contrast, when Camille Desmoulins thundered against Sparta, it was to denounce its excessive egalitarianism. He attacked the Girondin Brissot, that pro-Lycurgian, "who has rendered his citizens equal just as a tornado renders equal all those who are about to drown." All in all, this type of discourse remained rather shallow. The cult of antiquity was primarily maintained as a metaphor for social regeneration, as exemplified by Saint-Just's words hurled at the Convention: "The world has been empty since the Romans; their memory can replenish it and it can augur liberty."[20]

If we wish now to continue our study of "genuine" democracy, we must once again turn to Greek democracy rather than to those regimes that the contemporary world designates by the word.

The comparison between ancient democracies and modern democracies has frequently turned into an academic exercise.[21] It is generally emphasized that the former were direct democracies, whereas the latter (due to larger areas and populations) are representative democracies. Moreover, we are frequently reminded that slaves were excluded from the Athenian democracy; consequently, the idea emerged that Athens was not so democratic, after all. These two affirmations fall somewhat short of satisfying answers.

Readied by political and social evolution during the sixth century B.C., as well as by reforms made possible by Solon, Athenian democracy entered its founding stage with the reforms of Cleisthenes, who returned from exile in 508 B.C. Firmly established from 460 B.C., it continued to thrive for the next one

hundred and fifty years. Pericles, who succeeded Ephialtes in 461 B.C., gave democracy an extraordinary reputation, which did not at all prevent him from exercising, for more than thirty years, a quasi-royal authority over the city.[22]

For the Greeks democracy was primarily defined[23] by its relationship to two other systems: tyranny and aristocracy. Democracy presupposed three conditions: isonomy (equality before laws); isotimy (equal rights to accede to all public offices); and isegory (liberty of expression). This was direct democracy, known also as "face to face" democracy, since all citizens were allowed to take part in the *ekklesía*, or Assembly. Deliberations were prepared by the *boulé* (Council), although in fact it was the popular assembly that made policy. The popular assembly nominated ambassadors; decided over the issue of war and peace, preparing military expeditions or bringing an end to hostilities; investigated the performance of magistrates; issued decrees; ratified laws; bestowed the rights of citizenship; and deliberated on matters of Athenian security. In short, writes Jacqueline de Romilly, "the people ruled, instead of being ruled by elected individuals." She cites the text of the oath given by the Athenians: "I will kill whoever by word, deed, vote, or hand attempts to destroy democracy.... And should somebody else kill him I will hold him in high esteem before the gods and divine powers, as if he had killed a public enemy."[24]

Democracy in Athens meant first and foremost a community of citizens, that is, a community of people gathered in the *ekklesía*. Citizens were classified according to their membership in a deme—a grouping which had a territorial, social, and administrative significance. The term *démos*, which is of Doric origin, designates those who live in a given territory, with the territory constituting a place of origin and determining civic status.[25] To some extent *démos* and ethnos coincide: democracy could not be conceived in relationship to the individual, but only in the relationship to the polis, that is to say, to the city in its capacity as an organized community. Slaves were excluded from voting not because they were slaves, but because they were not citizens. We seem shocked by this today, yet, after all, which democracy has ever given voting rights to non-citizens?[26]

The notions of citizenship, liberty, or equality of political rights, as well as of popular sovereignty, were intimately interrelated. The most essential element in the notion of citizenship was someone's origin and heritage. Pericles was the "son of Xanthippus from the deme of Cholargus." Beginning in 451 B.C., one had to be born of an Athenian mother and father in order to become a citizen. Defined by his heritage, the citizen (*polítes*) is opposed to *idiótes*, the non-citizen—a designation that quickly took on a pejorative meaning (from the notion of the rootless individual one arrived at the notion of "idiot"). Citizenship as function derived thus from the notion of citizenship as status, which was the exclusive prerogative of birth. To be a citizen meant, in the fullest sense of the word, to have a homeland, that is, to have both a homeland and a history. One is born an Athenian—one does not become one (with rare

exceptions). Furthermore, the Athenian tradition discouraged mixed marriages. Political equality, established by law, flowed from common origins that sanctioned it as well. Only birth conferred individual *politeía*.[27]

Democracy was rooted in the concept of autochthonous citizenship, which intimately linked its exercise to the origins of those who exercised it. The Athenians in the fifth century celebrated themselves as "the autochthonous people of great Athens," and it was within that founding myth that they placed the pivot of their democracy.[28]

In Greek, as well as in Latin, liberty proceeds from someone's origin. Free man **(e)leudheros* (Greek *eleútheros*), is primarily he who belongs to a certain "stock" (cf. in Latin the word *liberi*, "children"). "To be born of a good stock is to be free," writes Emile Benveniste, "this is one and the same."[29] Similarly, in the German language, the kinship between the words *frei*, "free," and *Freund,* "friend," indicates that in the beginning, liberty sanctioned mutual relationship. The Indo-European root **leudh-*, from which derive simultaneously the Latin *liber* and the Greek *eleútheros*, also served to designate "people" in the sense of a national group (cf. Old Slavonic *ljudú,* "people"; German *Leute,* "people," both of which derive from the root evoking the idea of "growth and development").

The original meaning of the word "liberty" does not suggest at all "liberation"—in a sense of emancipation from collectivity. Instead, it implies inheritance—which alone confers liberty. Thus when the Greeks spoke of liberty, they did not have in mind the right to break away from the tutelage of the city or the right to rid themselves of the constraints to which each citizen was bound. Rather, what they had in mind was the right, but also the political capability, guaranteed by law, to participate in the life of the city, to vote in the assembly, to elect magistrates, etc. Liberty did not legitimize secession; instead, it sanctioned its very opposite: the bond which tied the person to his city. This was not liberty-autonomy, but a liberty-participation; it was not meant to reach beyond the community, but was practised solely in the framework of the polis. Liberty meant adherence. The "liberty" of an individual without heritage, i.e. of a deracinated individual, was completely devoid of any meaning.

If we therefore assume that liberty was directly linked to the notion of democracy, then it must be added that liberty meant first and foremost the liberty of the people, from which subsequently the liberty of citizens proceeds. In other words, only the liberty of the people (or of the city) can lay the foundations for the *equality* of political and individual rights, i.e., rights enjoyed by individuals in the capacity of citizens. Liberty presupposes independence as its first condition. Man lives in society, and therefore individual liberty cannot exist without collective liberty. Among the Greeks, individuals were free because (and in so far as) their city was free.

When Aristotle defines man as a "political animal," as a social being, when he asserts that the city precedes the individual and that only within society can the individual achieve his potential (*Politics*, 1253a 19-20), he also suggests that

man should not be detached from his role of citizen, a person living in the framework of an organized community, of a polis, or a *civitas.* Aristotle's views stand in contrast to the concept of modern liberalism, which posits that the individual precedes society, and that man, in the capacity of a self-sufficient individual, is at once something more than just a citizen.[30]

Hence, in a "community of freemen," individual interests must never prevail over common interests. "All constitutions whose objectives are common interest," writes Aristotle, "are in accordance with absolute justice. By contrast, those whose objective is the personal interest of the governors tend to be defective." (*Politics*, 1279a 17sq). In contrast to what one can see, for instance, in Euripides' works, the city in Aeschylus' tragedies is regularly described as a communal entity. "This sense of community," writes Moses I. Finley, "fortified by the state religion, the myths and traditions, was the essential source of success in Athenian democracy."[31]

In Greece, adds Finley, "liberty meant the rule of law and participation in the decision- making process—and not necessarily the enjoyment of inalienable rights."[32] The law is identified with the genius of the city. "To obey the law meant to be devoted with zeal to the will of the community," observes Paul Veyne.[33] As Cicero wrote, only liberty can pave the way for legality: "Legum…servi sumus ut liberi esse possimus" ("We are the servants of the law in order that we can be free," *Oratio pro Cluentio*, 53.)

In his attempt to show that liberty is the fundamental principle of democracy (*Politics*, VII, 1), Aristotle succeeds in de-emphasizing the factor of equality. For the Greeks equality was only one means to democracy, though it could be an important one. Political equality, however, had to emanate from citizenship, i.e., from belonging to a given people. From this it follows that members of the same people (of the same city), irrespective of their differences, shared the desire to be citizens in the same and equal manner. This equality of rights by no means reflects a belief in natural equality. The equal right of all citizens to participate in the assembly does not mean that men are by nature equal (nor that it would be preferable that they were), but rather that they derive from their common heritage a common capacity to exercise the right of suffrage, which is the privilege of citizens. As the appropriate means to this *téchne*, equality remains exterior to man. This process, as much as it represents the logical consequence of common heritage, is also the condition for common participation. In the eyes of the ancient Greeks it was considered natural that all citizens be associated with political life not by virtue of universal and imprescriptible rights of humans as such, but from the fact of common citizenship. In the last analysis, the crucial notion was not equality but citizenship. Greek democracy was that form of government in which each citizen saw his liberty as firmly founded on an equality that conferred on him the right to civic and political liberties.

The study of ancient democracy has elicited divergent views from contemporary authors. For some, Athenian democracy is an admirable example of civic responsibility (Francesco Nitti); for others it evokes the realm of "activist" political parties (Paul Veyne); for yet others, ancient democracy is essentially totalitarian (Giovanni Sartori).[34] In general, everybody seems to concur that the difference between ancient democracy and modern democracy is considerable. Curiously, it is modern democracy that is used as a criterion for the democratic consistency of the former. This type of reasoning sounds rather odd. As we have observed, it was only belatedly that those modern national governments today styled "democracies" came to identify themselves with this word. Consequently, after observers began inquiring into ancient democracy, and realized that it was different from modern democracy, they drew the conclusion that ancient democracy was "less democratic" than modern democracy. But, in reality, should we not proceed from the inverse type of reasoning? It must be reiterated that democracy was born in Athens in the fifth century B.C. Therefore, it is Athenian democracy (regardless of one's judgements for or against it) that should be used as an example of a "genuine" type of democracy. Granted that contemporary democratic regimes differ from Athenian democracy, we must then assume that they differ from democracy of any kind. We can see again where this irks most of our contemporaries. Since nowadays everyone boasts of being a perfect democrat, and given the fact that Greek democracy resembles not at all those before our eyes, it is naturally the Greeks who must bear the brunt of being "less democratic"! We thus arrive at the paradox that Greek democracy, in which the people participated daily in the exercise of power, is disqualified on the grounds that it does not fit into the concept of modern democracy, in which the people, at best, participates only indirectly in political life.

There should be no doubt that ancient democracies and modern democracies are systems entirely distinct from each other. Even the parallels that have been sought between them are fallacious. They have only the name in common, since both have resulted from completely different historical processes.

Wherein does this difference lie? It would be wrong to assume that it is related to either the "direct" or "indirect" nature of the decision-making process. Each of them has a different concept of man and a different concept of the world, as well as a different vision of social bonds. The democracy of antiquity was communitarian and "holist"; modern democracy is primarily individualist. Ancient democracy defined citizenship by a man's origins, and provided him with the opportunity to participate in the life of the city. Modern democracy organizes atomized individuals into citizens viewed through the prism of abstract egalitarianism. Ancient democracy was based on the idea of organic community; modern democracy, heir to Christianity and the philosophy of the Enlightenment, on the individual. In both cases the meaning of the words "city," "people," "nation," and "liberty," are totally changed.

To argue, therefore, within this context, that Greek democracy was a direct democracy only because it encompassed a small number of citizens falls short of a satisfying answer. Direct democracy need not be associated with a limited number of citizens. It is primarily associated with the notion of a relatively homogeneous people that is conscious of what makes it a people. The effective functioning of both Greek and Icelandic democracy was the result of cultural cohesion and a clear sense of shared heritage. The closer the members of a community are to each other, the more likely they are to have common sentiments, identical values, and same way of looking at the world, and the easier it is for them to make collective decisions without needing the help of mediators.

In contrast, having ceased to be places of collectively lived meaning, modern societies require a multitude of intermediaries. The aspirations that surface in this type of democracy spring from contradictory value systems that are no longer reconcilable with unified decisions. Ever since Benjamin Constant (*De la liberté des anciens comparée à celle des modernes*, 1819), we have been able to measure to what degree, under the impact of individualist and egalitarian ideologies, the notion of liberty has changed. Therefore, to return to a Greek concept of democracy does not mean nurturing a shallow hope of "face to face" social transparency. Rather, it means reappropriating, as well as adapting to the modern world, the concept of the people and community—concepts that have been eclipsed by two thousand years of egalitarianism, rationalism, and the exaltation of the rootless individual.

Alain de Benoist is a leading French theoretician of the European New Right, the editor of ***Nouvelle École****, and a principal founder of the Group for the Research and Study of European Civilization (GRECE). In 1978 he was awarded the Grand prix de l'essai de l'Académie francaise.*

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End Notes

1. George Orwell, *Selected Essays* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957), p. 149.
2. François Guizot, *De la démocratie en France* (Paris: Masson, 1849), p. 9.
3. Georges Burdeau observes that judging by appearances, in terms of their federal organization, the institutions of the Soviet Union are similar to those of the United States, and in terms of its governmental system the Soviet Union is similar to England. *La démocratie* (Paris : Seuil, 1966), p. 141.
4. T.S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London: Faber & Faber, 1939).

5. Bertrand de Jouvenel, *Du pouvoir* (Geneva : Cheval ailé, 1945), p. 411.

6. Giovanni Sartori, *Democratic Theory* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1962), p. 3.

7. "Les démocrates ombrageux," *Contrepoint* (December 1976), p. 111.

8. Other authors have held exactly the opposite opinion. For Schleiermacher, democracy is a "primitive" political form in contrast to monarchy, which is thought to correspond to the demands of the modern state.

9. "Le pouvoir des idées en démocratie," *Pouvoir* (May 1983), p. 145.

10. Significantly, it was with the beginning of the inquiry into the origins of the French monarchy that the nobility, under Louis XIV, began to challenge the principles of monarchy.

11. The word "thing," which designated the parliament, derives from the Germanic word that connoted originally "everything that is gathered together." The same word gave birth to the English "thing" (German *Ding*: same meaning). It seems that this word designated the assembly in which public matters, then affairs of a general nature, and finally "things" were discussed.

12. "Les fondements de l'État libre d'Icelande: trois siècles de démocratie médiévale," in *Nouvelle Ecole* 25-26 (Winter 1974-75), pp. 68-73.

13. *Les Scandinaves* (Paris: Lidis [Brepols], 1984), p. 613.

14. Cf. P.M. Martin, *L'idée de royauté, ... Rome. De la Rome royale au consensus républicain* (Clermont-Ferrand: Adosa, 1983).

15. Here "democracy," as in the case of peasants' freedoms as well, already included social demands, although not "class struggle"—a concept ignored by ancient democracy. In the Middle Ages the purpose of such demands was to give voice to those who were excluded from power. But it often happened that "democracy" could be used against the people. In medieval Florence, social strife between the "popolo grosso" and the "popolo minuto" was particularly brisk. On this Francesco Nitti writes: "The reason the working classes of Florence proved lukewarm in defense of their liberty and sympathized instead with the Medicis was because they remained opposed to democracy, which they viewed as a concept of the rich bourgeoisie." Francesco Nitti, *La démocratie,* vol. 1 (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1933), p. 57.

16. This opinion is shared by the majority of students of ancient democracies. Thus, Victor Ehrenberg sees in Greek democracy a "form of enlarged aristocracy." Victor Ehrenberg, *L'état grec* (Paris: Maspéro, 1976), p. 94.

17. Pius XII, 1944 Christmas Message: http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/P12XMAS.HTM

18. M. Robespierre, "On Political Morality," speech to the Convention, February 5, 1794: http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/413/

19. On this debate, see the essay by Luciano Guerci, "Liberta degli antichi e liberta dei moderni," in *Sparta, Atene e i `philosophes' nella Francia del Setecento* (Naples: Guido, 1979).

20. Camille Desmoulins, speech to the Convention, March 31, 1794. It is significant that contemporary democrats appear to be more inclined to favor Athens. Sparta, in contrast, is denounced for its "war-like spirit." This change in discourse deserves a profound analysis.

21. Cf., for example, the essay by Moses Finley, *Démocratie antique et démocratie moderne* (Paris: Payot, 1976), which is both an erudite study and a pamphlet of great contemporary relevance. The study is prefaced by Pierre Vidal-Naquet, who, among other errors, attributes to Julien Freund (see n. 7, above) positions which are exactly the very opposite of those stated in the preface.

22. To cite Thucydides: "Thanks to his untainted character, the depth of his vision, and boundless disinterestedness, Pericles exerted on Athens an incontestable influence.… Since he owed his prestige only to honest means, he did not have to truckle to popular passions.… In a word, democracy supplied the name; but in reality, it was the government of the first citizen." (*Peloponnesian War* II, 65)

23. One of the best works on this topic is Jacqueline de Romilly's essay *Problèmes de la démocratie grecque* (Paris: Hermann, 1975).

24. Romilly, *Problèmes de la démocratie grecque.*

25. The word "*démos"* is opposed to the word "*laós,*" a term employed in Greece to designate the people, but with the express meaning of "the community of warriors."

26. In France, the right to vote was implemented only in stages. In 1791 the distinction was still made between "active citizens" and "passive citizens." Subsequently, the electorate was expanded to include all qualified citizens able to pay a specified minimum of taxes. Although universal suffrage was proclaimed in 1848, it was limited to males until 1945.

27. On the evolution of that notion, see Jacqueline Bordes, '*Politeia' dans la pensée grecque jusqu'à Aristote* (Paris : Belles Lettres, 1982).

28. Nicole Loraux interprets the Athenian notion of citizenship as a result of the "imaginary belonging to an autochthonous people" (*Les enfants d'Athéna: Idées athéniennes sur la citoyenneté et la divison des sexes* [Paris: Maspéro, 1981]). The myth of Erichthonios (or Erechtheus) explains in fact the autochthonous character and the origins of the masculine democracy, at the same time as it grafts the Athenian ideology of citizenship onto immemorial foundations.

29. Emile Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes,* vol. 1 (Paris : Minuit, 1969), p. 321.

30. On the work of Aristotle and his relationship with the Athenian constitution, see James Day and Mortimer Chambers, *Aristotle, History of Athenian Democracy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1962).

31. Finley, *Démocratie antique et démocratie moderne,* p. 80.

32. Finley, *Démocratie antique et démocratie moderne*, p. 141.

33. Veyne adds: "Bourgeois liberalism organizes cruising ships in which each passenger must take care of himself as best as he can, the crew being there only to provide for the common goods and services. By contrast, the Greek city was a ship where the passengers made up the crew." Paul Veyne, "Les Grecs ont-ils connu la démocratie?" *Diogène* (October-December 1983, p. 9).

34. For the liberal critique of Greek democracy, see Paul Veyne, "Les Grecs ont-ils connu la démocratie?" and Giovanni Sartori, *Democratic Theory* (see n. 6 above).