

Demented Democracy

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Ah, democracy, rule by the people, the promised path to just government and the end of tyranny. What ever happened to it?

Finian Cunningham [writes](#), “From 1945-97, there was at least the semblance that the British Labour Party in particular represented the interests of the working and lower middle classes. But under the ‘reforming’ leadership of Tony Blair and his successor, Gordon Brown, ‘New Labour’ has become indistinguishable from the other main parties in terms of slavishly fawning over big business and the wealthy elite. Prior to the 1997 election, which brought Labour to government, one senior Conservative smugly noted that, in terms of economic policy, there was ‘not a cigarette paper between’ the Thatcherite Tory Party and Blair’s New Labour.” In America, this has been the reality for decades. How many times have the people had to choose between the least evil of two candidates? America has but one political party—the Republicrat.

A recent [report](#) in the Guardian goes, “While the US and Britain slide towards oligarchy, the forced elections in Afghanistan and Iraq have brought no good. The west’s proudest export to the Islamic world this past decade has been democracy. That is, not real democracy, which is too complicated, but elections. They have been exported at the point of a gun and a missile to Iraq and Afghanistan, to ‘nation-build’ these states and hence ‘defeat terror’. When apologists are challenged to show some good resulting from the shambles, they invariably reply: ‘It has given Iraqis and Afghans freedom to vote.’”

But democracy has taken an even more sinister turn—fraud and the rejection of results.

When Hamas won the election in the Gaza Strip by a large majority the results were rejected by Fatah and the western nations that had previously advocated that very election and had agreed to abide by the result.

The AP [reported](#) that “Hassan Turabi, the leader of the Islamic Popular Congress Party, said . . . his group would reject the results of [the] vote [in the Sudan] and challenge them in court. . . . Election observers say the vote fell short of international standards.”

The [BBC](#) writing on Iran’s last election reported that “Mahmoud Ahmadinejad . . . won some 62.6% of the vote in an election marked by a high turnout of 85%, official figures show. Supporters of pro-reform candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi have cried foul and clashed with riot police in Tehran, despite a ban on public protests.”

It was widely reported that the 2009 presidential election in Afghanistan was characterized by lack of security, low voter turnout and widespread ballot stuffing, intimidation, and other electoral fraud. Two months later, under heavy U.S. and ally pressure, a second round run-

off vote between incumbent President Hamid Karzai and his main rival Abdullah Abdullah was announced for November 7, 2009. However, Abdullah announced that he would no longer be participating in the run-off because his demands for changes in the electoral commission had not been met, and a “transparent election is not possible.”

When former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi’s Iraqiyya list won the election in Iraq by two seats, Nouri Maliki mounted a legal challenge and suggested that six of the winning candidates should be disqualified because of alleged ties to the former Baath government.

And now [Paul Craig Roberts](#) writes, “The hypocrisy of the US government is yet again demonstrated in full bore force. The US government invaded Iraq and Afghanistan, laid waste to much of the countries including entire villages and towns, and massacred untold numbers of civilians in order “to bring democracy” to Iraq and Afghanistan. Now after days of Egyptians in the streets demanding ‘Mubarak must go,’ the US government remains aligned with its puppet Egyptian ruler, even suggesting that Mubarak, after running a police state for three decades, is the appropriate person to implement democracy in Egypt.”

What is one to conclude from all of this? Is it that democracy is wonderful so long as those already in power remain there?

This democratic dementia is the result of a long term trend.

Aristotle, one of the world’s deepest thinkers, is often blamed for defining mankind as rational even though he never did. He did, however, consider mankind as rational, and he used that notion in an example when writing about definition, which is, I suspect, the source of the misbelief.

That Aristotle chose to use the word man in this context suggests that the notion of mankind as rational was quite common in classical Greece, so common that no one would question it and sidetrack the discussion about definition. After all, Aristotle was a student of Plato’s and Plato’s Dialogues provide us with a model of a rational man—Socrates. But most of the characters in the Dialogues are not rational to the extent that Socrates is. They are, however, persuadable when presented with evidence and logical argument. And I suspect that that’s what Aristotle means when he writes, in the Nicomachean Ethics, that human beings have a rational principle; he means that human beings are persuadable.

The Greek notion of rationality, however, was quite different from ours. In the phrase “zoon logikon” (animal-rational) “logikon” is not exactly what we mean by “rational” That term, to the Greeks, refers to the power to think and other attributes needed to distinguish humans from all other animals. At least one of these attributes is believing, as, for instance, in the statement man is a believing animal. So to the Greeks, a person whose mind is cluttered with beliefs would be a zoon logikon. The Greeks would have distinguished such a person from a logical person, and at least Plato and Aristotle valued a logical person more highly than the merely rational. Not so today!

Today, at least in America, beliefs, which are often merely unsupportable opinions, seem to be valued higher than knowledge which is based on evidence and supported by logic. So, in a sense, creedal man has replaced rational man. Belief has come to trump knowledge. Mankind has become creedal, ideological.

Ideological groups, however, consist of true believers who cannot be persuaded. When an

ideology is adopted, it is as though evidence and logic are no longer needed. The ideology contains an answer to every question, a solution to every problem. Evidence, logic, even truth become irrelevant.

In doing so, however, mankind has divided itself into impersuadable groups that clash with each other. Ordinarily, people consider such groups to be religious. Where their ideologies differ, for instance, Moslems and Christians will never agree. People holding incompatible notions cannot agree. Sooner or later, the result is either a religious war or total separation. But antagonistic groups arise everywhere ideology is used to guide human behavior. Capitalists and Socialists will never agree; Capitalism and Socialism are incompatible ideologies. Neither will Democrats (who truly represent the people) and Republicans (who represent the commercial class) or environmentalists and exploitationists. Every ideology becomes a religion, and every religion has its own solution to every problem. Because mankind has abandoned knowledge for belief, peace on earth has become an impossible dream.

Even logical enterprises like science have become creeds. Just as Christians believe that the second coming will solve all of mankind's problems, many now believe that technology will. But no one knows that; it's a mere belief. When the results of technology are examined, it becomes obvious that technology is at least as harmful as it is beneficial. It, after all, has given mankind weapons of massive destruction which may be used to annihilate everyone. It has also given mankind the means that enable governments to watch everyone. Technology has provided governments with totalitarian tools that are more effective than any mankind has previously known.

Plato and Aristotle surely must have known how important belief was even in the minds of their fellow Greeks and the deleterious effects of it. So, both Plato and Aristotle sought to replace belief in people's minds with knowledge which is what every Platonic dialog does. Plato and Aristotle knew that only when mankind adopts evidence and logic can people become persuadable, and only persuasion can remove the ideological conflicts that divide mankind into antagonistic groups.

[Recently](#), Christopher Hitchens and Tony Blair debated the question, Can religion be a force for good in the world? On the one hand, Hitchens stated that we don't need divine permission to know what good action is, but he also stated that we can't rely on people to be innately good. So then what standard do we rely on? He never tells us.

Blair, on the other hand, argued that we shouldn't blame religion solely for the world's problems. So then, what is it about human nature that causes some people, in the name of religious and political systems, to do bad things? This question is also never answered.

Blair admitted that some people have committed evil in the name of religion, but this has been completely outweighed by its goods. Hitchens continually denounced religion as fostering a mentality that makes "good people do unkind things."

The question debated was never resolved because both debaters argue from their beliefs. Each debater talks past the other. But the most interesting part of the debate came when instead of making a closing statement, Blair and Hitchens decided to take one last question: 'Which of your opponent's arguments do you find most convincing?'

Blair answered first. "I think that the most convincing argument is — and the argument that

people of faith have got to deal with is actually the argument Christopher has just made — which is that the bad that is done in the name of religion is intrinsically grounded in the scripture of religion. That is the single most difficult argument.” He must have had in mind the Torah’s exhortations to exterminate whole nations, men, women and children and other similar passages.

Hitchens said: “The remark Tony made that I most agreed with this evening, I’ll just hope that doesn’t sound too minimal, was when he said that if religion was to disappear, things would by no means, as it were, automatically be okay.”

In the end, Blair recognized that religious ideologies in the form of scripture contain evil aspects. Hitchens, on the other hand, admits that the elimination of religion alone will not make mankind good.

Both, of course, are true, but both also fail to see that the elimination of belief and its replacement by truth arrived at by evidence and logical argument is the only way to resolve the question, for otherwise, neither side can persuade the other. Without the willingness of people to accept only logical evidence based on fact or agreed upon assumptions, no one will ever persuade anyone of anything. It is this unwillingness based on unquestionable ideologies that makes persuasion impossible.

The topic of this debate could just as well have been either of the following two: Can belief be a force for good in the world? Can ideology be a force for good in the world? And the answer to the original and these two is no. Only knowledge sought and applied in moral ways can effectively be a force for good in the world.

Recently, members of Congress and the President have been at odds over compromising which seems difficult to achieve. The Republicans are willing to accept something the Democrats want only if the Republicans get all of what they want, which is a paradigm case of an ideological conflict. Nothing good can come of it. But nothing good can come from compromise either. Combining some of the beliefs derived from two antagonistic ideologies always results in unworkable policies. For instance, when the right opposes social programs that the left advocates and a compromise occurs in which the right accepts some limited social programs and the left accepts the limitations, the result is inadequate and ineffective policy. The same is true of most of the social problems that afflict America today. All attempted solutions are compromised into ineffectiveness. This won’t change until the ideologies are abandoned and problem solving relies on evidence and logic. In all cases religion, in the wide sense of ideology, can never improve mankind’s condition.

This addiction to opinion, each person being entitled to his own, and the unwarranted notion that those who fight for their beliefs are “principled” is why democracies teeter between antagonistic belief systems and are unable to resolve any social problems. Each party strives to repeal the policies enacted by the other which paralyzes the political process. The problem is worldwide. Democracy itself is falling into this ideological abyss. When elections are held the losers now routinely reject the outcome yelling “fraud”! Often it leads to demonstrations and violence. When people reject the grounds for persuasion, conflict is the inevitable result. Democracy cannot function when people are not persuasible.

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