

Democracy in Ancient Athens and in the Contemporary World

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*ἀπάντων γὰρ αὐτὸς αὐτὸν πεποίηκεν ὁ δῆμος κύριον, καὶ πάντα διοικεῖται
ψηφίσμασιν καὶ δικαστηρίοις, ἐν οἷς ὁ δῆμός ἐστιν ὁ κρατῶν. καὶ γὰρ αἱ τῆς
βουλῆς κρίσεις εἰς τὸν δῆμον ἐληλύθασιν. καὶ τοῦτο δοκοῦσι ποιεῖν ὀρθῶς·
εὐδιαφθωρότεροι γὰρ ὀλίγοι τῶν πολλῶν εἰσιν καὶ κέρδει καὶ χάρισιν.*

Aristotle Athenian Politeia

Abstract

Democracy is a controversial subject. This paper argues that democracy was a historical exception which was born and died in Ancient Athens during the 5th-4th Centuries BCE. A political system can be called democracy if four criteria are satisfied: *isonomy*, *isoteleia*, *isegoria* and *isocracy*. Non-democracies do not satisfy these criteria, especially the last two. Nevertheless, democracy may not be the best political system for a given society and a non-democracy may serve the *politeia* and its citizens much better. On the other hand, modern technology can establish the conditions whereby the criteria of *isegoria* and *isocracy* can be satisfied. But democracy can only flourish if citizens have the necessary gnosis and arête, i.e. pedagogy. And again modern technology permits the application of a test (examination) before anyone acquires the right to participate in the *ecclesia of demos* and be selected as one of many rulers that democracy entails.

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1. Prolegomena

A *politeia* can be organized in many different ways. Aristotle studied the political systems of his time and distinguished about two hundred different types of organizing “political animals”. He even wrote a separate monograph for each one of these systems. Regrettably, only one survived, but, fortunately, this was about the most important of all, the *Athenian Politeia*. Many well known philosophers and historians of the antiquity wrote about the Athenian *politeia* as well, notably Plato, Thucydides and Xenophon but useful information can be also retrieved from other writers such as the tragic and comedy play writers and the rhetoricians of Ancient Athens as well as Plutarch of the first century CE. Most of them were very critical, raising strong objections against the political system of Ancient Athens. Their arguments have survived the test of time and are still valid today as is explained below.

Notwithstanding these objections, today as in the past, many consider the Ancient Athens’ political system, if not an ideal, the best ever applied. Throughout the history of politics, Ancient Athens’ political system has been the subject of extensive research. The scope of these studies can be categorized into three general sub-categories: (a) the historical developments which gave rise to this unique political system, including whether Athens was really the first in applying it (b) the nature and characteristics of this extraordinary political system and (c) the effect this system has had in the development of the theory and the practice of political developments. All three subjects have been ardently debated and the pertinent research has scrutinized every aspect of the Ancient Athenian *politeia*. This huge literature has its own merits but it is considered redundant to the issues discussed in this paper. The ancient writings are pertinent and sufficient. In other words, this paper does not provide any literature review of the numerous writings on democracy.

This paper makes three basic arguments. Firstly, it is argued that Ancient Athens’ political system is distinctive in terms of four criteria. As such is exceptional and can be thought as a unique historical anomaly. It is argued that this system was born and died during the two centuries of Ancient Athens’ golden age of 2500 years ago. Secondly and related to the four criteria, the contemporary political systems of the advanced countries of the world bear the same name as the political system of Ancient Athens, usually with

an adjective, but this is a misnomer because there are notable dissimilarities. The differences are both quantitative and qualitative. The latter are the most important. Thirdly, fortunately Pandora's Box is not empty. There is still hope for all those who admire the Ancient Athens' political system. Many present-day Prometheus have stolen numerous secrets from Gods which can be used to re-engineer the modern political systems using the experimentation of Ancient Athens as a point of reference. Modern Atlases (politicians like Solon, Cleisthenes and Pericles) are needed to hold the world in their sturdy shoulders and hands in order to develop a political system which will surpass the Ancient Athens astounding achievements of organizing its *politeia*.

Many pros and cons have been written about the Ancient Athens political system but no author or politician has ever questioned the premise that there was any other political system in the history of the world which has had such an immense influence on the development of political thought and practice. The influence exerted by the Ancient Athenian system on politics has been immense with notable examples the establishment of the English parliamentary system, the French Revolution and the American War of Independence. As in Ancient Athens, their political systems, however one might want to call them, were established by the use or the threat of violence. All looked at Ancient Athens' political organization for ideological legitimizations, political inspirations and practical directions and guidance.

The paper is developed along the lines described above. It is organized into seven sections, including these prolegomena. Section two provides a definition of the political system of Ancient Athens which reached the colophon of its glory in the mid-5th Century BCE, i.e. during Pericles' rule. It is during this and the following century where most writings appeared on Ancient Athens *politeia*. They are the only source of valuable information. Section three analyses the four criteria, as these were applied in Ancient Athens. Today all four can be used as a yardstick to compare deviations from Ancient Athens' system. This is done in section four which compares the Athenian *politeia* with the political systems of the most advanced countries today, emphasizing USA's current political system. Section five discusses, in brief, some of the main criticisms raised on Athenian *politeia*. Section six argues that modern technology permits the reverse engineering of the political system of Ancient Athens. What is needed is a political force

to implement them, similar to the forces that led to reforms of Solon, Cleisthenes and Pericles in Ancient Athens. The epilogue of the paper is written in section seven.

2. And the Name is Called Democracy

Thucydides, in 431 BCE, citing Pericles' *Funeral Oration* on the occasion of honoring the first dead of the Peloponnesian War, defined the political system of Ancient Athens as follows:

“... and the name is called democracy because not the few but the many rule”
“... καὶ ὄνομα μὲν διὰ τὸ μὴ ἐς ὀλίγους ἀλλ’ ἐς πλείονας οἰκεῖν δημοκρατία κέκληται”

Two words have led to many misunderstandings: *πλείονας* (many) and *οἰκεῖν* (rule, manage, administer). Democracy exists when all participate and the many (not the few) decide and rule. Without the all, the many does not define democracy. As it stands in the excerpt, the word “many” is unfortunate because it gives rise to two interpretations. The first relates to the modern political mechanism of majority voting in electing representatives and/or rulers¹ by all eligible citizens or decision making by any political organ, i.e. parliament. It is a system where elected “representatives” of the people decide and rule on their behalf for a relatively long period of time which would have been considered absurd, not only in Ancient Athens, but also in oligarchic political systems such as that of Ancient Sparta. In Ancient Athens, such a “representative” democracy would have been considered a mockery of democracy.

The second interpretation is considered as an authentic² definition of democracy because this was the one that was applied in Ancient Athens or at least that is what

¹In many cases not even this is satisfied. In the recent USA presidential elections, the majority of the votes were casted for the candidate who was not elected. In 1963 the same occurred in Greece. The political party which obtained the relative majority of votes had fewer seats in the Greek Parliament and could not form a government. Modern “democracy” at its best! In both cases, the electoral law was applied. The system was legal; its political system was not a democracy.

²The term “direct” democracy is not used because there is no such thing as “indirect” or “representative” democracy. The word authentic implies that all other schemes are not

Pericles claimed to be the case at the time. If one reads the *Funeral Oration* carefully, it will come to the conclusion that Pericles meant that in a democracy all and not many (*πλείονας*) must participate in the decision making process and in ruling (*οἰκεῖν*) their *politeia*. Democracy exists when all citizens regularly participate to decide on every issue and rule their *politeia*. And of course, decisions on every issue are taken by all citizens by majority voting. The word “many” does not mean majority voting for representatives but majority voting to decide on specific issues with the participation of all citizens. In Ancient Athens, majority voting could change neither the fundamental laws nor could implement laws which were against the minority¹.

The political system of democracy should be distinguished from all political systems where few decide and even fewer rule, even when these few are elected by all eligible citizens. Herodotus, the so called father of history, distinguishes three political systems: monarchy, oligarchy and democracy. In Ancient Greece, all three existed which varied from one man’s rule (monarchy or tyranny), to few men’s rule (oligarchy or aristocracy), and finally to all men’s rule (democracy). In a democracy, all who vote participate in the decision making process and rule without any exclusion. This is not the case in non-democracies.

The critical concept is “majority voting” which is a mechanism to take decisions by any political body, democratic or not democratic². This by itself does not define a democracy. A democracy exists if the majority voting applies only to the *ecclesia of*

democracies but fakes (parodies). In this text all these political systems are called non-democracies. Even monarchies call themselves democracies! Brutal dictators that stay in power for all their lives call their political system democracy, sometimes even “people’s” democracy. This would have been absurd in Ancient Athens. Of course, a monarchy or a dictatorship can be a very good political system and a monarch or a dictator an excellent ruler but simply put it: it is not a democracy!

¹These laws were called “πατρώοι νόμοι”. Actually, the *ecclesia of demos* voted on resolutions (*ψηφίσματα*) and not so much on laws. If someone wanted to change a law, he had to request the permission of the *ecclesia of demos* first with at least 6000 casted votes (about 1/3 to 1/4 of the total members of the *ecclesia of demos*) to obtain the right to propose a change of law. For those who did not follow this rule, there were harsh punishments, including death penalties. In Ancient Athens, this “illegal” process of changing the laws was called “*γραφὴ παρανόμων*”.

²In a junta decisions are taken by majority voting among the conspirators.

demos (people's general assembly) with the participation of all citizens. The key word is participation and not the decision making mechanism such as the majority voting which existed in oligarchic and monarchic political systems. For example, in Ancient Sparta, as in many other city-states, decisions were taken by majority voting of an oligarchic body of five *Eforoi* (magistrates). They were elected by a people's general assembly called *Apella* and they served for one year only. This did not make Sparta a democracy even though by today's standards, its political system would be considered an ideal "representative" democracy.

Thus, in a democracy the difference is not so much on the mechanism of the decision making process but who participates¹ and who rules². In Ancient Athens all citizens participated in deciding and in ruling their city-state and this is qualitative difference between democracy and non-democracy. An ancient Athenian citizen would participate and vote many times every year (up to forty) in the *ecclesia of demos* and serve their *politeia* as *vouleitai* (members of parliament which had a consultative role to the *ecclesia of demos*), judge, archons, etc., almost on a daily basis. This made it an authentic democracy because all participated. Aristotle in his *Politics* defines democracy as the system where:

“... all citizens participate”

“... τὸ μετέχειν ἅπαντας τοὺς πολίτας”

¹Aristotle in his *Athenian Politeia* emphasizes the participation as the difference between pro-democracy and the democracy historical period of Athens “...χαλεπώτατον μὲν οὖν καὶ πικρότατον ἦν τοῖς πολλοῖς τῶν κατὰ τὴν πολιτείαν τὸ δουλεύειν• οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἐδυσχέραινον• οὐδενὸς γὰρ ὡς εἰπεῖν ἐτύγχανον **μετέχοντες**”. And also “...ὅς ἂν στασιαζούσης τῆς πόλεως μὴ θῆται τὰ ὄπλα μηδὲ μεθ’ ἐτέρων, ἄτιμον εἶναι καὶ τῆς πόλεως **μὴ μετέχειν**”. (emphasis added)

²Aristotle in his *Athenian Politeia* makes a historical account of nine archons in Ancient Athens: (a) one king (b) one polemarchos (war archon) (c) one eponymous archon and (d) six Thesmothetai (law record keepers) with roles that differed throughout the political history of Ancient Athens. In the 5th century BCE were appointed by a lottery system for a year and after they served as permanent members of *Areios Pagos*.

The key concept here is the word *ἄπαντας* which portrays a stronger meaning than the word “όλοι” (all). A better translation would have been “without exception”. This has nothing to do with the idea of majority voting and electing representatives and “archons”. Thus, majority voting cannot distinguish a democracy from a non-democracy because as a mechanism of making decisions can exist in any political system. How can then a democracy be distinguished from non-democracies? Alternatively, how can non-democracies measure up to democracy? The next section presents and discusses four criteria which can be applied to distinguish a democracy from a non-democracy.

3. The Four Criteria of an Authentic Democracy

In a democracy all citizens participate in the decision making process for every issue of everyday life. Any citizen can introduce an issue to be decided by the *ecclesia of demos*, which is the political body deciding and ruling with the participation of all eligible citizens. They decide by majority voting on the issues and they convene in regular time periods. Who is the archon is not important because they are appointed for a short period of time to implement the *ecclesia of demo's* resolutions (*ψηφίσματα*). In many cases, their term in office was not renewable. During any given period of time (usually a year), there were many archons with different responsibilities which diffused political power. In Ancient Athens not a single archon could concentrate all powers and all of them were under the scrutiny of the *ecclesia of demos*. Actually, the practice of ostracism protected the *politeia* from leaders who were considered dangerous because they were concentrating too much political power. They would send them in exile, i.e. up to 10 years away from Athens after a secret ballot.

Throughout the history of democracy in Ancient Athens, periods of good and bad democratic practices can be identified. Good and bad decisions were adopted by the *ecclesia of demos*. Good and bad rulers were drawn, selected or elected to serve in office. These weaknesses of democracy were well known in Ancient Athens and are discussed in a section five below. However, any democracy, to be deserved to be called as such, must satisfy four criteria. Ancient Athens' political system did. These criteria are the following:

- Isonomy: every citizen must be equal before the law. This implies protection from corrupted judges and from rich litigant who hire shrewd lawyers.
- Isoteleia: All citizens should be taxed according to their wealth (property) and income and receive subsidies and wages in order to be able to participate in the painstaking political process demanded by democracy.
- Isegoria: Freedom to speak only before a political body which decides (votes) for all the issues of the *politeia*, e.g. the *ecclesia of demos*.
- Isocracy: All citizens must have the same probability to be selected (drawn) as archons.

These criteria have been misused and misinterpreted creating confusions and misunderstandings. In many cases, this was a deliberate attempt to justify a non-democracy as a democracy. Others though have idolized “democracy” instead of considering it as one of many other political systems with advantages and disadvantages. As mentioned above, under certain circumstances, democracy may not be the most appropriate political system. Xenophon, an Athenian of the 4th Century BCE, argued, in his *Lacedaemonian Politeia*, that Sparta’s political system was superior to Athens, especially for the development and the education of the youth.

Democracy in Ancient Athens did not emerge “democratically”. It was the result of a violent struggle between opposing fractions of population. And it remained unstable throughout the two centuries of its reigning. In other city-states such struggles resulted to a tyranny which did not have the same meaning as it has today. A tyrant could be very close to what Plato was calling a philosophy king. Plato himself tried to implement such a system in Syracuse when he was invited by the tyrant of the city. His dreadful experience is a testimony how difficult such an endeavor is. A brief discussion of all four criteria is required to shed some light on this important discussion.

Isonomy

All citizens must be equal before the law if the criterion of *isonomy* is to be satisfied. In Ancient Athens there was a clear distinction between private and public life. People were equal before the law. In his *Funeral Oration* Pericles states that in Athens “...all

citizens are equal before the law for their private differences”¹. Democracy must also guarantee that all citizens and non-citizens are equal before the law. In Ancient Athens, non-citizens (*metoikoi*² and *douloi*³) were equal before the law for their private affairs with citizens and non-citizens alike. With few exceptions, such as ostracism, the *ecclesia of demos* could not vote on a law which applied to only one man (*επ’ ἀνδρῶν*). And in any case, ostracism was only for the male Athenian citizens along with the other obligations they had such as serving as soldiers and fighting and dying for their homeland.

It seems that most modern advanced countries are satisfying the criterion of *isonomy*. Nonetheless, *isonomy* can exist in tyrannies and monarchies as well. Ancient Sparta had *isonomy*. The rule of law is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a democracy. For example, a monarch or a tyrant can guarantee *isonomy* for all of its subjects. In Ancient Athens, Peisistratus, as Aristotle mentions in his *Athenian Politeia* and Herodotus in his *History Books*, was a tyrant (dictator) very popular during his rule because he applied *isonomy* and in many cases he even discriminated in favor of the poor and against the rich. Actually, in Sparta - an oligarchic system with two kings - the rule of law was stronger and was respected by all, especially by the archons⁴. Some authoritarian regimes are better suited to apply the rule of law and of course *isonomy*, especially in protecting all citizens from criminal activities.

In contemporary advanced societies, the biggest threat to *isonomy* does not normally come from the political process itself but from the judiciary. Corruption of judges exists in both democracies and non-democracies since antiquity. It is well known that Hesiod’s

¹ “...μέτεστι δὲ κατὰ μὲν τοὺς νόμους πρὸς τὰ ἴδια διάφορα πᾶσι τὸ ἴσον”.

² Similar to what landed immigrants are today in many advanced countries.

³ This is translated as slaves but in Ancient Athens the word meant work as it still does today in Modern Greek. Pseudo-Xenophon writing about the Athenian Politeia around 420s BCE “complaints” that citizens in the Athenian democracy could not mistreat them (*metoikoi* and *douloi*) because they dress the same way as the citizens and there is the danger to mistake some citizens as *metoikoi* or *douloi*.

⁴ Xenophon, in his *Lacedaemonian Politeia*, wrote “But everyone knows that in Sparta all are convinced to obey the authorities and the laws” translated from the original text “Ἀλλὰ γὰρ ὅτι μὲν ἐν Σπάρτῃ μάλιστα πείθονται ταῖς ἀρχαῖς τε καὶ τοῖς νόμοις, ἴσμεν ἅπαντες”. I translate the word *πείθονται* as “convinced to obey” as opposed to “obey” only because this better express the meaning of what Xenophon explained in Chapter 8 of his book where this quote comes from.

inspiration to write his monumental work in the mid-8th Century BCE was a response to corrupted archons (kings), who, at the time, served as judges. Hesiod writes in his *Works and Days* referring to a property dispute with his brother:

“... many you seize by bribing the judges who this way they want to judge”
“... ἀρπάζων ἐφόρεις μέγα κυδαίνων βασιλῆας δωροφάγους, οἳ τήνδε δίκην ἐθέλουσι δικάσσαι”

How can then citizens be protected from corrupted judges? In Ancient Athens, during the democracy epoch, an emblematic way was found to account for corrupted judges. They made the cost of corrupting unbearable high because of the large number of citizens who served as judges. In addition, judges were not known before hand. They were drawn from a list of 6000 eligible citizens in the morning of the court hearing. This procedure made the transaction and monetary cost of bribing the judges prohibitive. Moreover, and most importantly, an attempt by a litigant to bribe judges could not be kept secret, if someone attempted to bribe all 6000 judges. This system assured as much *isonomy* as one can get from judges. And from the history of Ancient Athens, during its glorious years of democracy, there is no serious report of a court decision which was the result of bribing the judges. There are many though who criticized decisions taken by judges implying wrongdoings, especially in comedies played in the Athenian theaters.

In Ancient Athens, as in the modern world, protection from lawyers was not possible. The rich could buy the services of skilled lawyers to draft their court speeches because lawyers did not have the right to appear before the Athenian court. On the other hand, the rich were subject to an unusual type of unfair treatment. Athenian judges were particularly harsh in fining the rich because their salaries as judges depended on these fines.

Isoteleia

Organized societies exist because they provide specific services to its citizens. This is the beginning of Aristotle's book on *Politics*. Societies must spend on what is called public goods. *Isoteleia* requires that all citizens ought to contribute to public spending proportional to their income and wealth (property) but a *politeia* can find other revenue

sources as well. This is well documented in Xenophon's excellent book on Public Revenues (*Poroi* or *Peri Prosodon*). Actually Solon reformed the Athenian *politeia* into four classes based on income and wealth and not on heredity. Each class had specific economic obligations in contributing to the provision of public goods and civic services.

A large portion of public spending in Ancient Athens was allocated to defense, to public infrastructure and to cultural activities. In a democracy, *isoteleia* implies that public money is used efficiently, effectively and with transparency. This was guaranteed by the unique process which existed in Ancient Athens to finance major public works. The rich of Ancient Athens were obliged to finance the building and the maintenance of military equipment (naval ships, horses, weapons etc) and bear the costs of various sport and religious festivities called *liturgies*. This direct way of financing public spending improved the efficiency, the effectiveness, the competitiveness and the democracy (transparency) of public spending¹.

This way there was no misuse of rich people's taxes because public spending on a particular item was directly managed by the one who paid for it. As a matter of tax fairness, the rich could claim that they were others, richer than themselves, who should pay more. In this case, it was possible to have an exchange of properties. Anyone who claimed that was not as rich as someone else, he would be asked to exchange his property with someone else's whom he considered richer. This was an excellent way of evaluating and comparing wealth among Athenian citizens.

Isoteleia is another issue which modern political systems have found solutions to even though there is no such thing as a perfect tax system. In the relevant literature of democracy, *isoteleia* does not attract the attention of the other three criteria and this is unfortunate because, in a democracy, *isoteleia* plays another and more important role. Given that all citizens must participate in the decision making process and in ruling of their *politeia*, penury should not prevent them from doing so. Poor citizens must be compensated for the loss of their labor income when they serve their *politeia* as members of the *ecclesia of demos* and/or as one of the many archons and judges. In today's

¹In modern Greece as in many other countries this is applied on a voluntary base. Greek tycoons have financed the building of hospitals, universities, museums and art centers. They are done efficiently and on time.

economic jargon, in a democracy, *isoteleia* must include a negative income tax, i.e. subsidies and wages to participate in the decision making process and in serving as archons. In Ancient Athens, during the years of its golden age of democracy, circa mid-5th Century BCE, all citizens were compensated to participate in the *ecclesia of demos*.

In conclusion, democracy without *isoteleia* is not possible. But there is a negative aspect to it as well. If *isoteleia* permits the participation of citizens with low opportunity cost (poor people), then the effect of the lack of pedagogy on democracy becomes evident and very perilous. The best way to describe it is using the words of Pseudo-Xenophon in his *Athenian Politeia* of 420s BCE:

“...in the masses mostly exists ignorance and mess and slyness: penury leads to the obscenely and the rudeness and the ignorance because some people lack money”

“... ἐν δὲ τῷ δήμῳ ἀμαθία τε πλείστη καὶ ἀταξία καὶ πονηρία: ἢ τε γὰρ πενία αὐτοῦς μᾶλλον ἄγει ἐπὶ τὰ αἰσχρὰ καὶ ἢ ἀπαιδευσία καὶ ἢ ἀμαθία <ἢ> δι’ ἔνδειαν χρημάτων ἐνίοις τῶν ἀνθρώπων”

This is a remarkable statement of the cause-effect relationship of lack of money (*ἔνδειαν χρημάτων*) on penury (*πενία*) and the effect of poverty on (a) obscenely (*αἰσχρὰ*), (b) ignorance (*ἀμαθία*), and (c) rudeness (*ἀπαιδευσία*). It is this penury (*πενία*) that leads some of the poor people of the Athenian *demos* to become victims of demagogues and populists. And in Ancient Athens, as in the contemporary world, there was not a short supply of demagogues. *Isoteleia* then must not only assure that poor people are able to participate in the *ecclesia of demos* but guarantee that they are receiving the necessary pedagogy to fulfill their duty as citizens.

In Ancient Athens, the theater (tragedy and comedy) and the athletic games played this pedagogical role. Poor people were subsidized to attend the plays in the theaters and festivities of the Ancient Athens and this was a learning process which promoted gnosis with *arête*, i.e. pedagogy. The other two institutions which promoted pedagogy, the private schools of philosophers and the private symposiums organized by the Athenian intelligentsia of the time, could not be attended by poor and ignorant people¹. Unlike

¹The problem was not poverty but ignorance. Socrates was not rich.

Sparta, Ancient Athens never implemented a pedagogical system of free education¹. If a strong free pedagogy was provided by the state, it would have made democracy immune to all criticisms that people without *gnosis* and *arête* were allowed to decide (vote) in the *ecclesia of demos* and rule as archons and judges. This aspect has been the most important criticism raised against democracy both in Ancient Athens and in the modern world. This issue is further examined in section five below.

Isoteleia was not perfect in Ancient Athens. Unlike *isonomy*, there were many accusations against archons of embezzling and misusing public money and avoiding paying their due taxes. Even Pericles and his well known friends, who built Parthenon, were accused of mishandling and wasting public money. Unlike what Pericles mentions in his *Funeral Oration*, sycophants were not absent in a democracy. On the contrary, democracy provided the opportunity to increase the number of sycophants because *isegoria* gave the freedom of speech which was misused by all those who lacked *gnosis* and *arête*. *Isegoria* is examined next.

Isegoria

Many confuse *isegoria* with the general ideal of freedom of speech. Such freedom is definitely a characteristic of democracy but where and when this right is exercised distinguishes a democracy from a non-democracy. In a democracy, *isegoria* means the right of every eligible citizen to speak freely only before a political body that matters such as the *ecclesia of demos* at specified time and place with a specific agenda. As was mentioned above the *ecclesia of demos* decides on all political issues and appoints rulers of the *politeia* with the participation of *all* citizens. In Ancient Athens, democracy meant freedom to decide or in the words of Pericles "... *we freely decide for our common things*"². Thus, *isegoria* requires three things. Firstly, it demands freedom to speak not anywhere but only in the political organ that decides and rules. Secondly, all eligible citizens must participate in this body, otherwise it is not democracy. Thirdly, all must

¹In Ancient Athens there was a public system of education for all its youth but it was only for military purposes for the males from 18 to 20 years old.

²"... ἐλευθέρως δὲ τὰ τε πρὸς τὸ κοινὸν πολιτεύομεν". There is a lot of discussion of the concept of freedom, both its negative (private life) and positive (public life) aspect. This is important but beyond the scope of the arguments made here.

have the right to vote freely during the specific deliberations of this political organ for all the issues that relate to the ruling of their *politeia*¹.

Today many confuse the meaning of *isegoria* with the lack of censorship. The freedom of press is a manifestation of this misunderstanding. Actually, the so called freedom of press violates the criterion of *isegoria* because (a) the audience of the mass media and press neither decides nor rules, at least directly² (b) each citizen does not have the same right or probability to appear in the mass media and (c) the audience is not what should be in a democracy.

The ancient Athenian who spoke in the Pnyx (the place under the Parthenon where the *ecclesia of demos* was convening) was free to speak but most importantly to be listened by all those, who, at the end, would vote on a specific issue, e.g. go to war. Speaking without the relevant (decision making) audience to listen is not what was meant by *isegoria*. In contrast, today by freedom of speech is meant to speak at any place, any time and through any medium. The question is who listens? This is far from what the ancient Athenians meant by *isegoria*. In Ancient Athens democracy and freedom to decide on political issues went hand in hand. Today freedom to speak does not extend to the freedom to decide on each and every one political issue or a “common thing” in Pericles words. Instead, the freedom is restricted to elect someone who for many years will decide on behalf of the citizens for each and every issue of concern to all. These elected representatives have the freedom to speak in a political body which decides.

¹In Ancient Athens this political organ was the *ecclesia of demos*. In Sparta it was called *Apella*. However, in Sparta, *Apella* could not decide on all issues. Only on those submitted by the five magistrates (*eforoi*) could decide. Today, this is equivalent to a referendum. In a referendum the questions to be asked are decided by an oligarchic political body, e.g. a parliament. By themselves eligible citizens cannot decide to have or not to have a referendum on any issue.

²Many argue that the media and the press indirectly decide and rule. Not only they are oligopolistic business but they constitute the contemporary oligarchs or tyrants. However, the growing importance of social media has weakened the power of media oligarchs by exposing their role. People now can get information and analyses of various issues free from the internet. All they need is gnosis to select accurate news and arête to decide which ones can be used for the betterment of society. This aspect of social media is further discussed below because it constitutes the cornerstone of reengineering democracy.

In a democracy, freedom to speak in public should not be allowed anywhere¹ but only in the *ecclesia of demos*, the political body which is institutionalized to make decisions with the participation of all citizens. Who speaks in the mass media is decided by an oligarchy and this definitely is not what is meant by *isegoria* in a democracy. Mass media's "audience" includes non-eligible citizens which is another violation of *isegoria* because it requires speaking only in front of a body that decides and rules. The audience of the so called "free" press cannot be identified as the decisive and ruling political body for many reasons but the most important is that includes children. For pedagogical purposes, children should not be allowed to participate to the deliberations of the "free" press. After all, Socrates had the freedom to speak in the Athenian *ecclesia of demos* but it did not have the right to "corrupt" the youth, i.e. the freedom to speak in front of a young audience.

The "free" press today corrupts not only the youth but all its citizens alike. The most important manifestation of this corruption is fake news that started as a joke in New York in 1938, continued as a tragedy with Hitler's Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda Joseph Goebbels and has come full circle today with news that are tragically comic, which use sophisticated techniques of "enlightening" the public. Unfortunately, many people, without *gnosis* and *arête*, believe and use these "news" because the audience is similar to what pseudo-Xenophon was describing 2500 years ago for the Ancient Athens *ecclesia of demos* which was mentioned above: ἐν δὲ τῷ δήμῳ ἀμαθία τε πλείστη καὶ ἀταξία καὶ πονηρία. Translating for today's audience of radios, televisions and newspapers: *the audience of the mass media (δήμῳ) is mostly ignorant (ἀμαθία), in mess (ἀταξία) and sly (πονηρία)*. Many uncultivated and ignorant citizens do not have the *arête* to choose between real and fake news. Most of them feel comfortable with fake news.

¹There is a good and simple reason for this. If public speaking in a restricted audience includes arguments against other people who are not there, then the whole process violates the criterion of *isegoria* because the people who are "accused" as holding an opposite view are not there to defend themselves and their views. Today this has taken a dramatic twist with the fake and manipulated news that circulate through the social media with a speed that the ancient god Hermes would envy.

In a democracy that satisfies the criterion of *isegoria*, there is no need the “masses” to get wild (ἀταξία). The criterion of *isegoria* implies that there is no need to organize political demonstrations and political gatherings of any kind because every citizen has the right and the opportunity to speak in front of the largest and most important political congregation ever, i.e. *the ecclesia of demos*. No need to demonstrate or lobbying. *Isegoria* makes these mechanisms to affect decisions and rulings obsolete and they should be abolished. This is part of reverse engineering of democracy discussed in section six below.

Isegoria gives the right to all citizens to participate in a decisive political body but also the opportunity to persuade the *ecclesia of demos* to take a particular course of action in order to rule the *politeia*. For example, going or not to war is an important decision and in a democracy this must be taken only by the *ecclesia of demos*. No pressure groups (lobby) are needed if the *ecclesia of demos* does its duty which is what is required from a democracy. For example, why should some people demonstrate to increase their pension? The issue can be debated and voted by all eligible citizens. According to *isegoria* all those who want to talk will talk. In Ancient Athens the beginning of the *ecclesia of demos* opened up with the question: Who wants to speak? (Τίς ἀγορεύειν βούλεται;). Today this can be done through the technology of the internet and social media, if they are organized to serve the contemporary *ecclesia of demos*. In a way everybody can “demonstrate” and “lobby” for his/her opinion on the issue from the comfort of his place without the need of a physical move. This aspect is further examined in section six of this paper.

Isocracy

All organized societies must have archons who will manage the *politeia*. *Isocracy* implies that every citizen must have the same probability to be selected as an archon. Most archons in Ancient Athens were selected by a drawing system from a qualified pool of eligible citizens serving for a short period, usually a year. This process not only assured that all citizens had the same probability to be selected but as many as possible could be selected given the short duration and the large number of positions to be filled.

In any case all archons were tested for their *arête* by the *vouli* (parliament) and the court of Athens¹.

The system of having many archons who served for short periods of time had additional advantages. Firstly, during the same time period, citizens were servicing as rulers (one of the nine archons) and as ruled citizens. As ruled citizens should respect the archons who ruled and of course in return citizens would respect them as rulers. Secondly, since more and more people served as rulers, they acquired more *gnosis* to be used as citizens to be ruled. Thirdly, it subdued any arrogant and egoistic behavior of the rulers because their status was the result of luck. *Hubris* was something that in Ancient Greece was considered as an action against the Gods (immoral behavior) and sooner or later *nemesis* will come. In Ancient Athens, the *ecclesia of demos* was very strict on such behaviors and citizens who were considered dangerous to society were ostracized.

Thus, *isocracy* means that all have the same right and equal probability to serve in public office. Is this the best solution? Of course, it is not. But Pericles in his *Funeral Oration* stated that in the Athenian Democracy there was:

“... for the public offices, everyone wherever prospers, not because he belongs somewhere but because of his ability, even if poor, if he has something good to offer to the city, he is not prevented from serving as officer”

“... κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἀξίωσιν, ὡς ἕκαστος ἔν τῳ εὐδοκιμεῖ, οὐκ ἀπὸ μέρους τὸ πλεόν ἐς τὰ κοινὰ ἢ ἀπ' ἀρετῆς προτιμᾶται, οὐδ' αὖ κατὰ πενίαν, ἔχων γέ τι ἀγαθὸν δρᾶσαι τὴν πόλιν, ἀξιώματος ἀφανεία κεκώλυται”

¹This does not mean that were appointed without being examined especially for the *arête*. Aristotle in his *Athenian Politeia* give details of this test of archons by the *Vouli* and the Court: “...ἐπερωτῶσιν δ', ὅταν δοκιμάζωσιν, πρῶτον μὲν 'τίς σοι πατήρ καὶ πόθεν τῶν δήμων, καὶ τίς πατὴρ πατήρ, καὶ τίς μήτηρ, καὶ τίς μητὴρ πατήρ καὶ πόθεν τῶν δήμων'; μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα εἰ ἔστιν αὐτῷ Ἀπόλλων Πατρῶος καὶ Ζεὺς Ἐρκεῖος, καὶ ποῦ ταῦτα τὰ ἱερά ἐστιν, εἶτα ἡρία εἰ ἔστιν καὶ ποῦ ταῦτα, ἔπειτα γονέας εἰ εὖ ποιεῖ, καὶ τὰ τέλη (εἰ) τελεῖ, καὶ τὰς στρατείας εἰ ἐστράτευται. ταῦτα δ' ἀνερωτήσας, 'κάλει' φησὶν 'τούτων τοὺς μάρτυρας'. ἐπειδὴν δὲ παράσχηται τοὺς μάρτυρας, ἐπερωτᾷ 'τούτου βούλεται τις κατηγορεῖν'; κἄν μὲν ἢ τις κατήγορος, δοὺς κατηγορίαν καὶ ἀπολογίαν, οὕτω δίδωσιν ἐν μὲν τῇ βουλῇ τὴν ἐπιχειροτονίαν, ἐν δὲ τῷ δικαστηρίῳ τὴν ψῆφον· ἐὰν δὲ μηδεὶς βούληται κατηγορεῖν, εὐθύς δίδωσι τὴν ψῆφον· καὶ πρότερον μὲν εἷς ἐνέβαλλε τὴν ψῆφον, νῦν δ' ἀνάγκη πάντας ἐστὶ διαψηφίζεσθαι περὶ αὐτῶν, ἵνα ἂν τις πονηρὸς ὦν ἀπαλλάξῃ τοὺς κατηγοροὺς, ἐπὶ τοῖς δικασταῖς γένηται τοῦτον ἀποδοκιμάσαι”.

In Ancient Athens, *isocracy* did not preclude those who were good at something (ὡς ἕκαστος ἔν τῳ εὐδοκίμει) to serve the public as archons (κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἀξίωσιν). This was definitely the case for military leaders and in the 4th century BCE for the archons responsible of public finances. Pericles himself served almost every year as an elected archon by the *ecclesia of demos*. And this had nothing to do with someone's economic situation (οὐδ' αὖ κατὰ πένιαν).

Summarizing the above discussion, a democracy must satisfy all four criteria otherwise is not a democracy. It can be something else, even better than a democracy. A better system is Plato's *utopian politeia*, if could ever become a reality.

All these criteria can be measured using standard quantitative indices for each one of them and a mechanism to add them up to create one index (measure) of democracy. A composite index of all four can be constructed which will determine the quality of democracy in each *politeia*. However, adding up the scores of the four sub-indices is complicated. Usually the summing up is a weighted average of the sum of the scores of the four indices, i.e. simple additive aggregation. This will be a weak measure of democracy. Sometimes this is called quality of democracy index and is applied to compare the political systems of different countries. This index then can be used to compare political systems that satisfy all the criteria of democracy.

A strong axiom of democracy would require that the aggregation is multiplicative but no index is using it. It implies that any zero performance in one of the four criteria nullifies the aggregate index of democracy. The construction of such measurable indices goes beyond the scope of this paper and most importantly beyond the author's personal talent. As Pericles has stated: ὡς ἕκαστος ἔν τῳ εὐδοκίμει. At least where he thinks he can be fruitful. Nevertheless, some thoughts in comparing the Ancient Athens democracy with the contemporary political systems are expressed in the next section of this paper.

4. Democracy and Contemporary Political Systems

In recent decades, many attempts have been made to measure and compare the quality of democracy using different indices. These indices are then used in statistical studies to show the casual relations between various variables such as economic growth,

education, health etc. However, we are not aware of any measure that uses all four criteria described in the previous section of this paper. And there is a good reason for this: no contemporary political system meets all four criteria of democracy as these were applied in Ancient Athens and were discussed in the previous section of this paper. As we shall show in this section, Ancient Athens was not only most probably the first democracy but according to the four criteria it was definitely the last one. At least up to now.

The word of caution mentioned above should be repeated here: democracy is not the best political system albeit some think it is the best ever applied. In other words, claiming that the current political systems do not belong to a democracy because they are not satisfying the four criteria, it does not imply that are better or worse. It simply implies that they are not a democracy as this was applied and most importantly was theorized in Ancient Athens. In Ancient Athens they practice and most importantly they philosophized about a different political system than any of the contemporary political systems which call themselves a democracy. The confusion is the result of using the same word to describe antithetical political systems.

As mentioned above, the system of today's representative democracy or whatever other adjective one may use resembles the political system of Sparta which in antiquity nobody called it a democracy. Till today, Sparta's system is called an oligarchic one. Actually it was more of a democratic representative democracy than any of the contemporary political systems. A better phrase to describe the contemporary political systems of the so called advanced countries of Europe and North America would be a representative meritocracy, i.e. the eligible citizens of these countries elect those representatives who they merit to have as representatives. Or in Plato's words (see *Symposium*): “ὅμοιος ομοίω αεί πελάζει”¹. This is different from aristocracy because, literally speaking, aristocracy means the best (aristae) are chosen (not necessarily elected) to rule the *politeia*. Aristocracy is just one type of an array of oligarchic political systems. A stratocracy (junta) is another one.

¹A word-to-word translation: “the same people get together” but it can be better expressed as “birds of a feather flock together”.

The analysis here is purely ontological and should not be interpreted as a deontological attempt to legitimize democracy. In other words, it is not suggested that contemporary political systems should become a democracy satisfying all four criteria. But if they want to become a democracy, they must do so, especially the criteria of *isocracy* and *isegoria*, because they score zero in both of them.

The USA's political system is mainly used as a point of reference. The political system of USA was allegedly inspired by Ancient Athens' democracy even though the founder fathers of the USA very smartly chose Ancient Rome's political system of a republic because they considered Ancient Athens' democracy unstable. Most probably they made a wise decision given the gnosis and arête of the USA citizens at the time of their War of Independence. The USA citizens' gnosis and arête remains the same today. USA's political system is a classical example of a representative meritocracy and the 2016 presidential election results is a great attestation which includes both candidates for the position of president of this great country. Under some not very restrictive requirements, this system is stable as was Sparta's oligarchy. Sparta collapsed because of *oliganthropia* (demographic decline) and not from political instability. The USA would never collapse.

Isonomy and isoteleia exist but can be improved

The performance of the contemporary political systems on *isonomy* and *isoteleia* are considered adequate and comparable with those of Ancient Athens. Definitely, there are many improvements that can be made but this is not what really differentiates them from a democracy. However, few points need to be highlighted. Firstly, *isonomy* and *isoteleia* today face similar problems as the ones in Ancient Athens. These problems were mentioned above. Secondly, it seems that Ancient Athens solution was consistent with its whole concept of democracy, i.e. all citizens participate. This increased the chances of a better application of *isonomy*. Thirdly, Ancient Athens system of public revenues and public expenditures had a unique feature which today is found only on a voluntary base. The wealthy of the Ancient Athens were obliged by the *ecclesia of demos* to directly finance specific works and services. This increased the efficiency, the effectiveness and the transparency of public works. This does not exist today.

One may then conclude that *isonomy* and *isoteleia* are not what actually distinguish a democracy from non-democracies. However, there is a qualitative difference. Other political systems can exist and be legitimized without *isonomy* and *isoteleia*. But a democracy must satisfy both. Democracy cannot exist without *isonomy*. And no democracy can flourish without *isoteleia* which includes compensations for all the poor people who are eligible to participate in the *ecclesia of demos* and serve as archons. *Isoteleia* requires something like a minimum guaranteed income for all its citizens, similar to the one introduced lately in Finland and is discussed in many other countries such as in France and the Netherlands¹. Democracy requires citizens' participation and this has a personal economic cost in the form of foregone income. If participation is not subsidized, then only the rich or their "representatives" can afford to participate. In the contemporary political systems, the participation of the poor is not subsidized because there is no such thing as an *ecclesia of demos* and of course there is no *isocracy* because not all citizens have the same probability to serve as archons. These two important criteria are examined next in this session.

There is freedom of speech but not isegoria in contemporary political systems

One of the most prominent features of the USA political system today is its freedom: to speak, to move, to marry, to study, to worship any God, to believe to any idea etc. Of course, these freedoms are subject to wealth and income constraints but this was always the case. USA is considered as the land of freedom and this constitutes the main ethos of the American dream. It is true. USA is a free country more than any other country in the world today. As mentioned above, freedom is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a democracy. This paper does not deal with the history of USA's freedom, especially its dark pages of the McCarthy years. It rather examines how the freedom of speech compares with the Ancient Athens criterion of *isegoria*. As shown in section three of this paper, *isegoria*, as a criterion of democracy, requires that all eligible citizens, without

¹There is an important difference from a guaranteed minimum income and an income to participate in the political process of a democracy. In the Finnish case citizens receive the income doing nothing. In Ancient Athens was a compensation for participating in the democracy process.

exception, participate and speak before a political body which decides and rules the country. Such a system simply does not exist and never existed in the USA or any other country of the past or contemporary political world.

Instead, at the federal level, eligible USA citizens “speak” silently and secretly every four years when they elect their president and their representatives for the congress and the senate by a system of majority voting at the level of state and not at the national level. These representatives then follow their own agenda without a concrete and enforced mechanism of asking their constituency on every issue for which they vote and take a stand on. *Isegoria* requires not only speaking before a political body which makes decision but being able to vote on all issues as well. Thus, the public hearings before the congress and the senate committees are by no means *isegoria*.

The USA citizens never had a chance to speak and vote on a specific issue at the federal level. Even the caricature of referendum is not allowed at the federal level in the USA. They are allowed at the state and county level for secondary issues. For example, should citizens be asked if their country goes to war? *Isegoria* requires that they should. Referendums are not manifestations of *isegoria* because this requires a very specific outline of the issues at stake for each alternative. For example, on the Brexit issue, *isegoria* would require citizens to vote on the new agreement as well. Also, in Ancient Athens, in less than a month citizens had the right to correct past decisions. Can the U.K. citizens do the same as this is required by *isegoria*? For example, should the U.K. citizens be asked to invoke article 50 to start negotiations with EU on a new agreement? Article 50 of the Lisbon Agreement states that “*Any member state may decide to withdraw from the union in accordance with its own constitutional requirements*”. The key word is “decide”. Who decides? In a democracy the *ecclesia of demos* decides. In U.K. it seems that the parliament will decide¹.

Referendums can even lead to controversial results as the Greek referendum of 2015. Nobody understood what the “Yes” and “No” meant. People voted “No” and the

¹If the British people were asked whether to invoke article 50, it would give them a great opportunity to re-cast their votes on the general issue of a Brexit as well. For example, a no vote would imply that Britain will continue with the current agreement with the European Union.

government decided “Yes”. It is really ironic, if not comic, that those who voted “No” were an amalgam of citizens with such diverge ideologies that ranged from supporters of Nazis to supporters of Stalin and many others in between. Again democracy at its best! *Isegoria* requires decisions on specific issues. Not only “no” or “yes” on one issue but “no” and “yes” on all issues. In the Greek case, *isegoria* would have included another referendum on the new agreement after being debated in public.

In Ancient Athens, citizens had the opportunity to vote with a secret ballot only in one type of referendum called ostracism. Any citizen could name any other citizen that considered him dangerous to democracy and to society at large. Then, Athenians would vote for or against the proposal and if it passed then the person had to leave Athens for 10 years. If ostracism was permitted in contemporary USA, the president elected in 2016 would have been most probably ostracized instead of being the first archon of the country as he is now. On the other hand, the president of Russian Federation and the president of the Turkish Republic would have never been ostracized. They are popular among citizens without gnosis and many of them without arête. This is true in many places of the world, including contemporary Athens which was the cradle of democracy. It seems that democracy has to wait many centuries before it can sleep in a queen size bed. Unlike Hercules, who, as an infant, strangled the snakes in his crib, the little girl called democracy did not make it. The “snakes” have envenomed her and put her in an eonian lethargy making it easier for modern governments to cheat on her.

The above arguments of freedom of speech equally apply to many other countries of the so called western and non-western world which claim that Ancient Athens was their inspiration. They call it democracy but always with such adjectives as “indirect”, “parliamentary”, “representative”, “monarchical”, “royal”, “juridical” or with possessives such as “people’s”. In a democracy these adjectives are contradicting the nature of democracy itself. In these political systems there is no political body where all citizens participate, decide and rule. And thus there can be no *isegoria* in the political systems of the world today. The parliament is not such a body. This has nothing to do with Ancient Athens’ *Vouli* which is translated as parliament. Its role was to prepare the draft resolutions (*ψηφίσματα*) to be decided by the *ecclesia of demos*. The latter is the political

body of a democracy. The contemporary countries simply do not have it and this is one of the reasons that it is claimed in this paper that do not have a democracy.

They have freedom but not democracy. The so called freedom of press is actually a violation of the principle of *isegoria*. It can be argued that the stronger the freedom of press in a country which claims to be democratic, the lowest its actual performance on *isegoria*. In a democracy, which satisfies the criterion of *isegoria*, the role of mass media becomes archaic and obsolete. They are not needed. The reason is very simple. As in Ancient Athens, contemporary Demosthenes can persuade the public opinion not through the mass media but by “standing up on the stool” and talk before the *ecclesia of demos*.

As mentioned above, under certain circumstances, the internet and social media can become an evolved mechanism which will permit *isegoria* in contemporary political systems at a very low cost of participation. In a way, these new means of communication and information technology supersede and outmode the traditional media such as the printed newspapers, radio and television. A process of re-engineering democracy can rely on social media and the internet to assure that the criterion of *isegoria* is fully satisfied as outlined below in section six of this paper. Technology makes *isegoria* possible. It is up to the citizens to make it a part of their political process. Ancient Athens showed that this can be achieved only with violence or the threat of violence as was the case during the Solon and Cleisthenes epochs in the pre-democracy period in Ancient Athens. It seems that democracy may not be established without non-democratic means.

There is no isocracy in USA today and in other contemporary political systems

In Ancient Athens all citizens had the same probability of being selected to serve as one of the many archons who existed at the time. In USA today, this would imply that all citizens must have the same probability of becoming the president of the USA, or a senator, or a member of congress, or any other position of archon, pending that they are eligible citizens. The process would require a draw from a large pool of qualified candidates to be selected through a transparent process as explained below in section six.

There is no *isocracy* in the USA today. Only as a joke stands the claim that the system today permits the election of the best of all possible candidates. For some

metaphysical reasons¹, it seems that all elected archons in the USA today lack both gnosis and arête. They lack pedagogy. It seems that there is no meritocracy² in this political process unless meritocracy is defined as the representatives that the USA citizens deserve. Those elected, the so called “representatives”, rely on their personal campaign with many false promises and huge campaign spending using all the modern practices of lobbying, fake news, blackmails and bribing. In other words, by definition, whoever is elected lack arête and should be forbidden to hold any public office. Instead they serve their country for almost all their life.

Unlike what happened in Ancient Athens, most of these representatives are elected almost on a permanent base; some of them “serving” for more than 50 years. It is a career without retirement. But surprisingly they do not complain! Such dedication to serve the public is really praiseworthy. Even the most notorious monarchs do not serve as long as some members of the USA congress and senators. And many of them, like the monarchs, are able to inherit this position to their children. This has nothing to do with Ancient Athens democracy and is an absurd violation of *isocracy* and of course democracy. It does not even resemble the oligarchy of Sparta because the “representatives” were elected only for one year.

But even the majority voting is violated in the presidential election of USA. In USA citizens vote every four years to elect their president. The electorate system of USA permits the election of a president not by majority voting but by a majority voting of a body of electors who do not necessarily represent the majority of USA voters. It is quite possible that a candidate with fewer votes to be elected president as happened in the most recent election of 2016.

From a logistical (technical) point of view, *isocracy* is the easiest to implement but the political difficulties and the economic interests are insurmountable. In Ancient

¹It may not be so metaphysical if the opportunity cost of serving the *politeia* is taken into consideration. Successful-skillful (ὡς ἑκαστος ἐν τῷ εὐδοκίμει) citizens with gnosis have a huge opportunity cost to enter into a political race similar to the one observed in the USA. If arête is added, then no successful-skillful citizen with arête would ever ask for the vote of the *masses* and the latter are here used only derogatively.

²The correct word is aristocracy, i.e. the best. But it has a different meaning in English as well as in Modern Greek language.

Athens, the process to more democracy was always implemented by violence or the threat of violence. *Isocracy* was one of them.

Isocracy can be used to measure the so called quality of democracy with a really a unique way of quantification: the equal probability of each citizen to be selected as archon (President, Secretary, Member of Congress, Senator in USA or President of the Republic, Prime Minister, Minister, Member of Parliament in other countries). The lowest is the probability of *isocracy*, the higher the quality of democracy. Promoting *isocracy*, i.e. reducing the probability to be drawn from a pool of eligible candidates, improves the quality of democracy. But the quality of democracy should not be measured as a process. The quality of citizens is important as well. Citizens without gnosis and arête cannot and should not be allowed to participate, cannot and should not be allowed to serve as rulers and most importantly cannot and should not be allowed to be ruled in a democracy. As Pericles put it in his *Funeral Oration* these are useless citizens and the modern world has many of them. This is one of the most important and valid criticisms against democracy which is examined in the next section.

5. Criticisms of Democracy in Ancient Athens

The previous section showed that the Ancient Athens democracy was unique. This political system was born in the 6th Century BCE and died in the 4th Century BCE in Ancient Athens. There is no question that this system was not an ideal (perfect) political system. Ancient philosophers were the first to emphasize the imperfections of democracy as was applied in Ancient Athens. Actually, the greatest minds of the ancient world, such as Plato and Aristotle, were very critical of democracy. However, many contemporary political philosophers and politicians alike think that it was the best political system ever applied in the human history of political organization. They praise Athens as the cradle of democracy assuming that they themselves live today in a country with democracy similar to Ancient Athenian democracy. As said above, contemporary political systems of the advanced countries of Europe and North America have freedom and this includes the freedom to believe in anything.

This section provides a very brief discussion of two criticisms of Ancient Athens democracy. Firstly, Ancient Athenian democracy was exclusive because not all

inhabitants were included in the democratic process of participation and decision making. Women, slaves, and non-residents were excluded. Second, democracy in Ancient Athens was too inclusive. Citizens (masses of people) without *gnosis* and *arête* had the right to participate, decide and serve as archons. The latter criticism of democracy was and still is the most important weakness of democracy.

Democracy in Ancient Athens was exclusive

Democracy exists when all eligible citizens participate in the decision making process and in ruling their *politeia*. But who is allowed to participate? This is an issue which was debated extensively in Ancient Athens' *ecclesia of demos*. In the mid-5th Century BCE and with Pericles concession the *ecclesia of demos* adopted a resolution which excluded all people who were born from a non-Athenian mother even though their father was an Athenian citizen. The irony of this resolution was that Pericles, decades later, could not register his own son as an Athenian citizen, also named after him Pericles, because his second wife, Aspasia, was not an Athenian. The resolution had to change again to allow such a registration. Thus, in the Athenian democracy exclusiveness was a fact and it was not only for women, *metoikoi* and *douloi* but even for free men.

Even though this is considered politically incorrect today, in Ancient Athens the only issue that was debated was whether *douloi* were slaves by nature¹. It seems that the received view was that *douloi* were considered inferior human beings and this confusion is usually based on Aristotle's contradictory views on *douloi*. It goes beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this issue. Three points must be made though. Firstly, there was no homogenous class of *douloi* in Ancient Athens and this might explain why there was not a single uprising of *douloi* in Ancient Athens. Some of them were medical professionals, members of police force, prison guards, estate managers, and workers in mines and agriculture. Some of them were educators, nannies and record keepers. There were also *douloi* belonging to the state and private *douloi*. Secondly, social mobility was allowed.

¹Who should participate in the political process is a big issue. In Sparta only those who could bear arms can participate. In some other cases citizens with children or property were allowed to participate. However, the most important criterion should be *gnosis* and *arête*.

Douloi could become free men by paying a certain amount of money or decided so by their masters. Some of such freed *douloi* became well known bankers in Ancient Athens. Thirdly, many philosophers debated the issue of *douloi*. A well known excerpt by Alcidas, a 4th century philosopher in Ancient Athens, stated:

“God made all free, nature made nobody a slave”

“πάντας ἐλεύθερους ἀφῆκε θεός, οὐδένα δοῦλον ἢ φύσις πεποίηκε”

In sum, in Ancient Athens’ democracy many men, women, *metoikoi* and *douloi* were excluded from participating in the decision making and in ruling the *politeia*. There were many reasons which are not further examined here¹. However, it should be mentioned that when comparisons are made between the contemporary political systems and the Ancient Athens democracy they ignore the fact that today almost all citizens and non-citizens are excluded from participating in the decision making process and in ruling their *politeia*. There is no *isocracy* and *isegoria* today which excludes the greatest number (99.9%) of citizens and non-citizens alike². Eligible citizens vote only for their “representatives” as previously explained and this is not a democracy but an oligarchic system similar to the system Ancient Sparta had.

Democracy in Ancient Athens included masses without gnosis and arête

Even though exclusiveness is a thorny issue and is still debated today, i.e. whether migrants for example should have the right to vote, the current debate on democracy

¹One criterion was those who can bear weapons and fight for their *Politeia*. As Aristotle puts it in his *Athenian Politeia* “...ἀπεδέδοτο μὲν ἡ πολιτεία τοῖς ὄπλα παρεχομένοις”.

²In the last fifty years less than 10000 people in USA (presidents, congress-members, senators, secretaries and judges) have decided on all political issues. As a percentage of population, which should be more than 350 million today with legal and illegal migrants and refugees taken into consideration, this is almost zero. Thus, zero is USA’s democracy score on *isocracy* and *isegoria*. Population statistics are not available for Ancient Athens but if it is assumed that the citizens who were eligible were definitely above 20000 and less than 30000 and all the population of Athens (children, women, *metoikoi* and *douloi*) could not be more than 500000, *isegoria* and *isocracy* was somewhere between 20/500 to 30/500. Very low but it is not zero.

completely ignores the substantial problem of inclusiveness. Should all eligible citizens have the right to vote? Should citizens who do not have the *gnosis* and *arête* be allowed to participate in the *ecclesia of demos* and serve as archons? This was Plato's dilemma. He believed that the best (*aristae*) of all citizens should rule the *politeia*, i.e. people with *gnosis* and *arête*.

In a democracy this is not possible unless the huge masses are taught *gnosis* and *arête*. Ignorant and vicious masses in Ancient Athens were the easy victims of malicious demagogues¹. However, not all demagogues were evil and catastrophic for their city-state. Pericles was one of the biggest demagogues of ancient times. According to Pausanias, he was a formidable speaker (demagogue) and was able to lure huge masses of people². Pausanias, in his book on Pericles, reports the following story. When the King of Sparta Archidamos asked Thucydides (not the historian but a leader of the Athenian aristocrats) who wrestles better, himself or Pericles, he responded that when he puts Pericles down in the *palaestra* (wrestling arena), he is able to persuade all the spectators that he won. Pericles was a demagogue but this did not prevent him from making Athens great and built such monuments as Parthenon and of course improving *isegoria* and *isocracy*, i.e. the quality of democracy. All these served his personal ambition of being

¹These demagogues did not have a fortunate life. As Aristotle stated it in his *Athenian Politiea* "... εἴωθεν γὰρ κἂν ἐξαπατηθῆ τὸ πλῆθος ὕστερον μισεῖν τοὺς τι προαγαγόντας ποιεῖν αὐτοὺς τῶν μὴ καλῶς ἐχόντων".

²It is not certain whether his reputable rhetorical skills would have been sufficient if he did not spend huge amounts of public money to subsidize the poor and creating jobs through the public works. Money did not come from taxes but from the other city-states who belonged to the Athenian League. Aristotle gave a complete account of the state nourished system that Pericles was able to build. In his *Athenian Politeia* he stated that "...κατέστησαν δὲ καὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς εὐπορίαν τροφῆς, ὥσπερ Ἀριστείδης εἰσηγήσατο. συνέβαινεν γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν φόρων καὶ τῶν τελῶν καὶ τῶν συμμάχων πλείους ἢ δισμυρίους ἄνδρας τρέφεσθαι. δικασταὶ μὲν γὰρ ἦσαν ἑξακισχίλιοι, τοξόται δ' ἑξακόσιοι καὶ χίλιοι, καὶ πρὸς τούτοις ἵππεῖς χίλιοι καὶ διακόσιοι, βουλὴ δὲ πεντακόσιοι, καὶ φρουροὶ νεωρίων πεντακόσιοι, καὶ πρὸς τούτοις ἐν τῇ πόλει φρουροὶ πενήκοντα, ἀρχαὶ δ' ἑνδημοὶ μὲν εἰς ἑπτακοσίους ἄνδρας, ὑπερόριοι δ' εἰς ἑπτακοσίους• πρὸς δὲ τούτοις, ἐπεὶ συνεστήσαντο τὸν πόλεμον ὕστερον, ὀπλίται μὲν δισχίλιοι καὶ πεντακόσιοι, νῆες δὲ φρουρίδες εἴκοσι, ἄλλαι δὲ νῆες αἰ τοὺς φόρους ἄγουσαι τοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ κυάμου δισχιλίου ἄνδρας. ἔτι δὲ πρυτανεῖον καὶ ὄρφανοὶ καὶ δεσμοτῶν φύλακες• ἅπασιν γὰρ τούτοις ἀπὸ τῶν κοινῶν ἡ διοίκησις ἦν".

the archon of Athens and his legacy as a great statement is still mentioned today. However, other demagogues, like Alcibiades and Cleon, led the Athenian democracy into disarray and eventually to its collapse.

It seems that demagogues must be men or women of *gnosis* and *arête*. Pericles had *arête* and *gnosis*. Alcibiades had only *gnosis*, most probably greater than Pericles because he had as a teacher the best of all, Socrates. He lacked *arête* though. After all, it seems that the Athenian court that condemned Socrates as corrupting the youth had in mind good cases to reach its verdict. Alcibiades was one of many. And this was not any court but the most important of all, the famous *Heliaia*, the supreme court of Athens of 6000 judges selected annually by a lot among the citizens of Athens over 30 years old. Two conclusions can be reached from the trial of Socrates. Firstly, teachers should be responsible for the *arête* of their students facing the death penalty. Secondly, teachers must respect the law. Socrates took full responsibility for the latter but did not admit the former even though it was true.

From the two criticisms of democracy, the inclusiveness is considered as more important for the contemporary societies. It seems that the difference in voting tendencies is not so much between women and men or migrants and non-migrants but between educated and non-educated citizens. Education is measured as years of formal education or degrees obtained. But in democracy (formal) education is not sufficient and not even necessary. After all countries with low scores on democracy, perform very well in the international education competitions of math, science and reading. They top in education and the flunk in democracy. What is required is encyclopedic knowledge (*gnosis*) for any specific issue to be decided. The masses of citizens without this *gnosis* should not be allowed to vote. Also, citizens who lack *arête* should not be allowed to vote either and this irrespectively of their *gnosis*. In brief only citizens with pedagogy should be allowed to vote.

Plato was very critical on this issue. Only people with *gnosis* and *arête* should be eligible to take part in the decision making process and be selected to rule the *politeia*. *Gnosis* and *arête* requires pedagogy, i.e. knowledgeable people with virtue. This was not possible in Ancient Athens. The masses of people with no *gnosis* and *arête* participated in the *ecclesia of demos*. They ruled and were ruled at the same time when they should have

been excluded from both. Ancient Athens could not solve this problem of democracy. Is it possible to address this thorny issue today? Fortunately, contemporary Promethean “thieves” have furnished modern societies with the technology to screen citizens with and without pedagogy. This requires a re-engineering of democracy which is examined in the next section of this paper.

6. Re-engineering Democracy: Prometheus and Atlas are needed

Democracy is not the best political system. Those, who support the claim that is the best system ever applied, have a misconception of what democracy is. They think that the political system which exists in many countries of the so called western world is a democracy. It is not. It does not satisfy at all the two most important criteria of democracy: *isegoria* and *isocracy*. One of the difficulties in meeting these criteria is the tremendous economic and transaction costs of applying the Athenian democracy today. Today’s *ecclesia of demos* would require the congregation of millions of citizens and in countries like USA hundreds of millions of citizens, not to mention China and India. No space can seat so many people. In addition, these citizens should be allowed to speak. No time could accommodate so many speakers. Time and space requirements make the application of *isegoria* impossible.

Fortunately and thanks to modern day Prometheus, information technology of the internet and social media provides a grand opportunity to re-engineer democracy in order to satisfy the criteria of *isegoria* and *isocracy*. Both will be discussed in turn but it should be kept in mind that what is important is not the technological aspect of the solution offered here but whether there is a political will to change the system of non-democracy that prevails today to a democracy that exists nowhere. Prometheus has done his job, what is needed is an Atlas to wake up and raise democracy to his shoulder and hold her there stable and forever.

Today’s technology not only permits the efficient (without economic cost) and the effective (get even better results) satisfaction of *isegoria* and *isocracy* but also makes possible the satisfaction of the most important criticism against democracy mentioned in the pseudo-Xenophon, i.e. masses without gnosis and arête decide and rule. The contemporary Prometheus has “stolen” the secrets from the gods of Hermes and

Hephaestus and the humanity is now in a position to test the rulers and those to be ruled at a very low cost and with full transparency. At last, Plato's concern can be taken care of. What was not possible for centuries now, it becomes technologically feasible in the 21st century.

The previous sections can be considered as the first step in the reengineering process of democracy suggested here. The first step was to identify what democracy is and what are the necessary steps to achieve it. The criteria can be applied in a system of processes which are made feasible by modern technology. It requires gnosis and a drastic change in the political system which will reduce the costs of *isegoria* and *isocracy*, improve the citizens role in serving their *politeia* and speed up the decision making process.

As previously defined, democracy can work only if citizens express their opinion (*isegoria*) for all issues before a deciding body such as the *ecclesia of demos*. Otherwise freedom of speech has no meaning. Thus, the first requirement of physical presence in the *ecclesia of demos* is now possible because modern technology can guarantee the "virtual" presence of all citizens who are eligible to vote. For example, Skype can bring millions of people together.

The second requirement of gnosis is more difficult to achieve. How can one express an opinion without knowledge? And most importantly how can a democratic society be protected by citizens who vote (express opinions) without knowledge? Opinions without knowledge lead to undesirable social results as these are demonstrated by many demagogues who were able to be elected and then created mass destruction not only for their own country but for the whole world. And this does not only refer to the obvious examples of Nazis and Fascists in Germany and Italy respectively. What would have happened to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, if the decision to destroy them were taken by a people's general assembly? It is quite possible that the result would have been another Milos as was the case in Ancient Athens during the Peloponnesian War in 416 BCE but at least the citizens of these two unfortunate cities would have been warned. In Milos, they were.

Most people who vote without knowledge become an easy victim of demagogues and populists. How can societies be protected by such ignorant people or to use Pericles characterization "useless citizens"? Today's technology provides a global opportunity to

test peoples' gnosis before they allowed to vote. This will protect democracy from ignorance and therefore from the demagogues because only citizens with gnosis would be allowed to express their opinion by voting. Still this is not enough but it is much better than what is done today. The best would have been if in addition to gnosis people were tested in terms of their arête. This is easily done when people have committed serious crimes but arête (virtue) could be applied to any unlawful and unethical behavior. Not all unethical behaviors are illegal. For example, should people, who violate the road user behavior code, be allowed to vote? It is well known (gnosis) that "drink and drive" kill people. All people know it or they should know it in a society with gnosis. If they do it, they lack arête and therefore should not be allowed to vote. Similarly, should people who smoke in front of others be allowed to vote? Smoking is not illegal. But does it characterize citizens with arête? People with arête should be examples to be followed.

Contrary to what happened in Ancient Athens, in the modern world gnosis can be easily acquired. There is an unprecedented amount of free time. Thus, there is no excuse of not being a well informed citizen. It is time to protect democracy by not allowing citizens to vote without knowledge (gnosis) on any specific issue. Today's technology permits the examination of this knowledge before one gets the right to vote. Every citizen should vote for every issue after taken an exam to verify his/her knowledge. This can take place in the voting booth before casting the ballot using the opportunities provided by modern technology. An exam can be set up in a series of multiply choice questions to be answered in 15-20 minutes in the voting booth. Many examples of such exams exist, e.g. exams to obtain a driver's license. There is no doubt that better processes can be designed but the idea is to assure that all voters "hear" and therefore have a gnosis of all the different opinions before they vote.

A note should be made on the exclusiveness. This issue does not apply in the new re-engineered democracy. Age, citizen status, sex, etc cannot exclude people from voting. For example, whoever passes the test of gnosis and arête is eligible to vote. To make it simple, a requirement can be imposed that the eligible citizens paid a utility bill in his/her name in the last 12 months which is equivalent of paying taxes such as VAT or sales tax. Paying taxes make them eligible to vote. The utility bill is used by many private and

public authorities as a legal document such as opening a banking account, registering the kids to elementary schools, etc. Why not determine the eligibility to vote?

As said above, the two characteristics which determine the extent of democratic deficit is *isegoria* and *isocracy*. Modern technology can take care of both of them. First, *isegoria* can become possible through the modern technology of the social media. Any individual can express his/her opinion for any issue, e.g. build a wall in the USA-Mexican border. Every voter must know the *pros and cons* of the issue as expressed by other people before they are allowed to vote. In such a process, the principle of *isegoria* is respected. If people are tested for the knowledge before they vote, then even if the system is that of representative democracy, the representatives would have a pecuniary incentive to promote gnosis and *arête* because their constituency would fail in the exams and their vote would not count. Schools to educate the electorate will be developed but there is a risk of negative externality, i.e. once ignorant voters learn, then they may not vote for their own initial representative any more. Many representatives today thrive on voters' ignorance.

The second criterion of *isocracy* is more difficult. In a democratic society there are many willing people (actually too many) who want and could serve the public. All these people must have gnosis and *arête* which should be superior to the gnosis and *arête* of voters. Thus, all people who want to serve the public must write tougher exams on all the issues concerned. If they pass these exams, they enter the pool of candidates. People can vote whether they accept them or not as candidates. As was the case in Ancient Athens with *Heliaia* (*Ἠλιαία*), a pool can be created and then members to serve can be chosen annually by lottery without the right to be re-selected. In the USA, the list of candidates to serve as a President will include millions of qualified citizens. Actually, this process can reveal and the quality of democracy. The lower the probability to be selected as archon (president) from a random sample of qualified citizens, the higher the quality of democracy. This way *isocracy* is served. There is no doubt that the USA university system could come up with excellent entrance exams to the pool of candidates to serve their country¹. Some tests like the SAT, ACT, GRE, and GMAT will serve the purpose as

¹These exams can start with very simple questions of basic political geography, history, arts, and humanities at the elementary or high school level. A future president of the USA

far as the gnosis is concerned. As for the arête, a record of any violation of law will do it as well.

The new technology of internet makes possible *isegoria* and *isocracy* with small economic and transaction cost. However, the political obstacles are insurmountable. To demonstrate how difficult this is, the example of U.K. can be used. Nobody would ever argue that democracy is compatible with a monarchy. Thus, U.K.'s system is not a democracy even though freedom exists. It is quite possible that this is a better system but is not a democracy. If people want to change the system from a monarchy (non-democracy) to a democracy, then every eligible U.K. citizen with gnosis and arête must have the same probability to serve as an archon (king or a queen) who will substitute the abolished monarch. Not only that, the "monarch" will change every year, drawn from a pool of U.K. citizens who will satisfy Pericles dictum "... κατά δὲ τὴν ἀξίωσιν, ὡς ἕκαστος ἔν τῳ εὐδοκίμῳ". This was the case in Sparta which, by the way, had two appointed kings and not only one like in the U.K. today.

There is no question that millions of USA citizens would qualify to be in the pool to be drawn to serve as members of congress or senate. And this is real a USA charisma. If the term in office was short (about 1-2 years) and the selected officers could not be redrawn, then the criterion of *isocracy* would have been fully satisfied. And unlike *isegoria*, this criterion presents no technological (logistical) challenges. On the contrary, it has some great advantages because there will be no incentive for any candidate to spend money to influence the press, bribe and be bribed, blackmail and be blackmailed by various lobby groups because the probability to be selected will be so small that the expected net present value of any political campaign will be zero. This process can be easily applied to other countries to select their archons and members of parliament. All is needed are Atlases to hold the world stable during this transition period because the reactions will be very strong. There are many "representatives" who will never give up their democratic right to serve their citizens. Their dedication is so strong that they are willing to sacrifice their lives for such superior cause. Arête at its best!

should know basic geography and history. And all of them must write tough exams on Thucydides *Peloponnesian War*.

7. Epilogue

Democracy is a political system which may not be the best for all political societies. This paper has argued that democracy must meet four criteria: *isonomy*, *isoteleia*, *isegoria* and *isocracy*. Most contemporary political systems lack behind in terms of the first two criteria relative to Ancient Athens. However, their achievements are noteworthy. On the other hand, no political system today satisfies the criteria of *isegoria* and *isocracy* as these were applied in Ancient Athens. Modern technology permits the re-engineering of democracy and the creation of a political system which meets all four criteria. Prometheus has done his duty to humanity again. He discovered the “fire” to light up the democracy torch. But this new technology needs Atlases to be implemented. It is a Herculean task and the little girl called democracy cannot fight the “snakes” of the contemporary political system. Democracy has a long way to go before it becomes a respected lady. But respect can come only from citizens with gnosis and arête and this is what is lacking today.

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(Note: dates are approximation and subject to dispute)

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