

[...] [T]he conspirators met together to consult about the situation of affairs. At this meeting speeches were made, to which many of the Greeks give no credence, but they were made nevertheless. Otanes recommended that the management of public affairs should be entrusted to the whole nation. "To me," he said, "it seems advisable, that we should no longer have a single man to rule over us – the rule of one is neither good nor pleasant. You cannot have forgotten to what lengths Cambyses went in his haughty tyranny, and the haughtiness of the Magi you have yourselves experienced. How indeed is it possible that monarchy should be a well-adjusted thing, when it allows a man to do as he likes without being answerable? Such licence is enough to stir strange and unwonted thoughts in the heart of the worthiest of men. Give a person this power, and straightway his manifold good things puff him up with pride, while envy is so natural to human kind that it cannot but arise in him. But pride and envy together include all wickedness – both of them leading on to deeds of savage violence. True it is that kings, possessing as they do all that heart can desire, ought to be void of envy; but the contrary is seen in their conduct towards the citizens. They are jealous of the most virtuous among their subjects, and wish their death; while they take delight in the meanest and basest, being ever ready to listen to the tales of slanderers. A king, besides, is beyond all other men inconsistent with himself. Pay him court in moderation, and he is angry because you do not show him more profound respect – show him profound respect, and he is offended again, because (as he says) you fawn on him. But the worst of all is, that he sets aside the laws of the land, puts men to death without trial, and subjects women to violence. The rule of the many, on the other hand, has, in the first place, the fairest of names, [*isonomia*]; and further it is free from all those outrages which a king is wont to commit. There, offices are decided by lot, the magistrate is answerable for what he does, and measures rest with the commonalty. I vote, therefore, that we do away with monarchy, and raise the people to power. For the people are all in all."

81. Such were the sentiments of Otanes. Megabyzus spoke next, and advised the setting up of an oligarchy: – "In all that Otanes has said to persuade you to put down monarchy," he observed, "I fully concur; but his recommendation that we should call the people to power seems to me not the best advice. For there is nothing so void of understanding, nothing so full of [insolence] as the unwieldy rabble. It were folly not to be borne, for men, while seeking to escape the [insolence] of a tyrant, to give themselves up to the [insolence] of a rude unbridled mob. The tyrant, in all his doings, at least knows what he is about, but a mob is altogether devoid of knowledge; for how should there be any knowledge in a rabble, untaught, and with no natural sense of what is right and fit? It rushes wildly into state affairs with all the fury of a stream swollen in the winter, and confuses everything. Let the enemies of the Persians be ruled by democracies; but let us choose out from the citizens a certain number of the worthiest, and put the government into their hands. For thus both we ourselves shall be among the governors, and power being entrusted to the best men, it is likely that the best counsels will prevail in the state."

82. This was the advice which Megabyzus gave, and after him Darius came forward, and spoke as follows: – "All that Megabyzus said against [the multitude] was well said, I think; but about oligarchy he did not speak advisedly; for take these three forms of government – democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy – and let them

each be at their best, I maintain that monarchy far surpasses the other two. What government can possibly be better than that of the very best man in the whole state? The counsels of such a man are like himself, and so he governs the mass of the people to their heart's content; while at the same time his measures against evil-doers are kept more secret than in other states. Contrariwise, in oligarchies, where men vie with each other in the service of the commonwealth, fierce enmities are apt to arise between man and man, each wishing to be leader, and to carry his own measures; whence violent quarrels come, which lead to open strife, often ending in bloodshed. Then monarchy is sure to follow; and this too shows how far that rule surpasses all others. Again, in a democracy, it is impossible but that there will be malpractices: these malpractices, however, do not lead to enmities, but to close friendships, which are formed among those engaged in them, who must hold well together to carry on their villainies. And so things go on until a man stands forth as champion of the commonalty, and puts down the evil-doers. Straightway the author of so great a service is admired by all, and from being admired soon comes to be appointed king; so that here too it is plain that monarchy is the best government. Lastly, to sum up all in a word, whence, I ask, was it that we got the freedom which we enjoy? – did democracy give it us, or oligarchy, or a monarch? As a single man recovered our freedom for us, my sentence is that we keep to the rule of one. Even apart from this, we ought not to change the laws of our forefathers when they work

Herodotus
The Histories
3. 80-82

EURIPIDES

Suppliant
Women

lines 346-57,
403-50

Theseus: [...] Here is what I shall do: I shall go and win release of the bodies, persuading the Thebans with my words. If that fails, then it shall be done by force, and the gods will not begrudge it. I want the city too to ratify this decision, and ratify it they will since that is what I wish. But if I add my reasons I will have more of the people's good will. And in fact I have made the people sovereign by freeing

this city and giving them equal votes. I shall take Adrastus along as the proof of what I am saying and appear before the citizen assembly. When I have won them over on this point, I shall gather a picked band of Athenian youth and return here. [...]

Herald: Who is the land's master? To whom shall I bring a message from Creon, who controls Cadmus' land since Eteocles was killed near the seven gates in fraternal bloodshed by Polynices?

Theseus: To begin with, stranger, you started your speech on a false note by asking for the master here. The city is not ruled by a single man but is free. The people rule, and offices are held by yearly turns: they do not assign the highest honors to the rich, but the poor also have an equal share.

Herald: Your words put me one point ahead, as in a game of draughts. The city I have come from is ruled by one man and not by a rabble. There is no one to fool the city with flattering speech and lead it this way and that to suit his own advantage. [At first he is welcome and gives much pleasure, but later he causes harm, and then, by the further expedient of slander, he conceals his earlier misdeeds and slips out of the reach of justice.] And anyway how can the common people, if they cannot even make a speech properly, know the right way to guide a city? It is time, not haste, that gives superior learning. Now the poor farmer, even if he is no fool, has no chance, because of his labor, to attend to the city's business. What is more, the better sort find it a sorry business when a man of low birth, a former nonentity, achieves prominence by entrancing the common people with his glib tongue.

Theseus: This herald is a clever talker and loves to speak elaborately on what is no part of his errand! Well, since you have begun this contest, hear me out: for it was you who proposed this debate.

There is nothing more hostile to a city than a tyrant. In the first place, there are no common laws in such a city, and one man, keeping the law in his own hands, holds sway. This is unjust. When the laws are written, both the powerless and the rich have equal access to justice, [and it is possible for the weaker man to address the same words to the fortunate man whenever he is badly spoken of,] and the little man, if he has right on his side, defeats the big man. Freedom consists in this: "Who has a good proposal and wants to set it before the city?" He who wants to enjoy fame, while he who does not holds his peace. What is fairer for a city than this?

[Wherever the people rule the land, they take pleasure in the young citizens that are its strength. But a king thinks this hateful, and he kills the nobles <and> all he regards as proud, fearing for his power. How then could a city be strong in the future when someone culls and cuts away the boldest of the young as one does the towering stalk in a springtime meadow? And why should one acquire wealth and a livelihood for one's children merely to produce greater livelihood for the tyrant? And why gently raise girls in the house only to be a sweet pleasure for the ruler when he wants them and a source of tears for those who raised them? Better to die than see one's children forcibly molested!] [...]

FIRST SLAVE

Now I'll tell them. We two have a master with a farmer's temperament, a bean chewer, prickly in the extreme, known as Mr. Demos of Pnyx Hill,⁴ a cranky, half-deaf little codger. Last market day he bought a slave, Paphlagon, a tanner, an arch criminal, and a slanderer. He sized up the old man's character, this rawhide Paphlagon did, so

⁴ Where the Athenian Assembly met.

he crouched before the master and started flattering and fawning and toadying and swindling him with odd tidbits of waste leather, saying things like, "Mr. Demos, do have your bath as soon as you've tried only one case."—"Here's something to nibble, wolf down, savor: a 3-obol piece."⁵—"Shall I serve you a snack?" And then Paphlagon swipes whatever any of the rest of us has prepared and presents it to the master. Why, just the other day I whipped up a Spartan cake at Pylos,⁶ and by some very dirty trick he outmaneuvered me, snatched the cake, and served it up himself—the one I'd whipped up! He shuts us out and won't allow anyone else to court the master; no, when master's having supper he stands by with a leather swatter and bats away the politicians. And he chants oracles; the old man's crazy about sibyls. And since he sees that the master's a mooncalf, he's devised an artful technique: he tells outright lies about the household staff; then we get whippings, and Paphlagon chases after the servants, shaking us down, shaking us up, demanding bribes, making threats like, "See how I got Hylas that whipping? You'd better be reasonable or you've lived your last day!" And we pay the price, because if we don't, the master will pound on us till we shit out eight times as much. (*to Second Slave*) So now, my friend, let's figure out quickly what path to take, and to whom.

ARISTOPHANES
"Knights"

lines 40 - 73

"Demos" - "Greek for
"the People".

CHORUS

Demos, you have a fine
sway, since all mankind
fears you like
a man with tyrannical power.⁹⁸
But you're easily led astray:
you enjoy being flattered
and thoroughly deceived,
and every speechmaker
has you gaping. You've a mind,
but it's out to lunch.

DEMOS

There's no mind under your long hair,
since you consider me stupid;
but there's purpose
in this foolishness of mine.
I relish
my daily pap,
and I pick one thieving
political leader to fatten;
I raise him up, and when he's full,
I swat him down.

CHORUS

In that case you'll do well;
and your character really does

contain, as you claim,
very deep cunning,
if you deliberately fatten these men,
like public victims,
on the Pnyx, and then
when you chance to lack dinner,
you sacrifice one who's bloated
and have yourself a meal.

DEMOS

Just watch me and see if I don't
ingeniously trick them,
those who think they're smart
and that I'm their dupe.
I monitor them all the time,
pretending I don't even see them,
as they steal; and then I force
them to regurgitate
whatever they've stolen from me,
using a verdict tube⁹⁹ as a probe.

ARISTOPHANES

"Knights"

(lines 1110-1150)

[...] But what was the road by which we reached our position, what the form of government under which our greatness grew, what the national habits out of which it sprang; these are questions which I may try to solve before I proceed to my panegyric upon these men; since I think this to be a subject upon which on the present occasion a speaker may properly dwell, and to which the whole assemblage, whether citizens or foreigners, may listen with advantage.

“Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighbouring states; we are rather a pattern to others than imitators ourselves. Its administration [is in the hands of] the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy, If we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences; if to social standing, advancement in public life falls to reputation for capacity, class considerations not being allowed to interfere with merit; nor again does poverty bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition. The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. There, far from exercising a jealous surveillance over each other, we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbour for doing what he likes, or even to indulge in those injurious looks which cannot fail to be offensive, although they inflict no positive penalty. But all this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless as citizens. Against this fear is our chief safeguard, teaching us to obey the magistrates and the laws, particularly such as regard the protection of the injured, whether they are actually on the statute book, or belong to that code which, although unwritten, yet cannot be broken without acknowledged disgrace.

“Further, we provide plenty of means for the mind to refresh itself from business. We celebrate games and sacrifices all the year round, and the elegance of our private establishments forms a daily source of pleasure and helps to banish the spleen; while the magnitude of our city draws the produce of the world into our harbour, so that to the Athenian the fruits of other countries are as familiar a luxury as those of his own.

“If we turn to our military policy, there also we differ from our antagonists. We throw open our city to the world, and never by alien acts exclude foreigners from any opportunity of learning or observing, although the eyes of an enemy may occasionally profit by our liberality; trusting less in system and policy than to the native spirit of our citizens; while in education, where our rivals from their very cradles by a painful discipline seek after manliness, at Athens we live exactly as we please, and yet are just

as ready to encounter every legitimate danger. In proof of this it may be noticed that the Lacedæmonians do not invade our country alone, but bring with them all their confederates; while we Athenians advance unsupported into the territory of a neighbour, and fighting upon a foreign soil usually vanquish with ease men who are defending their homes. Our united force was never yet encountered by any enemy, because we have at once to attend to our marine and to dispatch our citizens by land upon a hundred different services; so that, wherever they engage with some such fraction of our strength, a success against a detachment is magnified into a victory over the nation, and a defeat into a reverse suffered at the hands of our entire people. And yet if with habits not of labour but of ease, and courage not of art but of nature, we are still willing to encounter danger, we have the double advantage of escaping the experience of hardships in anticipation and of facing them in the hour of need as fearlessly as those who are never free from them.

THUCYDIDES
History of the
Peloponnesian
War
2. 37-42

“Nor are these the only points in which our city is worthy of admiration. We cultivate refinement without extravagance and knowledge without effeminacy; wealth we employ more for use than for show, and place the real disgrace of poverty not in owning to the fact but in declining the struggle against it. Our public men have, besides politics, their private affairs to attend to, and our ordinary citizens, though occupied with the pursuits of industry, are still fair judges of public matters; for, unlike any other nation, regarding him who takes no part in these duties not as unambitious but as useless, we Athenians are able to judge at all events if we cannot originate, and instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all. Again, in our enterprises we present the singular spectacle of daring and deliberation, each carried to its highest point, and both united in the same persons; although usually decision is the fruit of ignorance, hesitation of reflection. But the palm of courage will surely be adjudged most justly to those, who best know the difference between hardship and pleasure and yet are never tempted to shrink from danger. In generosity we are equally singular, acquiring our friends by conferring, not by receiving, favours. Yet, of course, the doer of the favour is the firmer friend of the two, in order by continued kindness to keep the recipient in his debt; while the debtor feels less keenly from the very consciousness that the return he makes will be a payment, not a free gift. And it is only the Athenians who, fearless of consequences, confer their benefits not from calculations of expediency, but in the confidence of liberality.

“In short, I say that as a city we are the school of Hellas; while I doubt if the world can produce a man, who where he has only himself to depend upon, is equal to so many emergencies, and graced by so happy a versatility, as the Athenian. And that this is no mere boast thrown out for the occasion, but plain matter of fact, the power of the state acquired by these habits proves. For Athens alone of her contemporaries is found when tested to be greater than her reputation, and alone gives no occasion to her assailants to blush at the antagonist by whom they have been worsted, or to her subjects to question her title by merit to rule. Rather, the admiration of the present and succeeding ages will be ours, since we have not left our power without witness, but have shown it by mighty proofs; and far from needing a Homer for your panegyrist, or other of his craft whose verses might charm for the moment only for the impression which they gave to melt at the touch of fact, we have forced every sea and land to be the highway of our daring, and everywhere, whether for evil or for

good, have left imperishable monuments behind us. Such is the Athens for which these men, in the assertion of their resolve not to lose her, nobly fought and died; and well may every one of their survivors be ready to suffer in her cause. [...]