

Thesis on contrasting views of classical athens: plato and pericles

[Politics](#), [Democracy](#)



Abstract

Plato proposed that the ultimate form of government was either an oligarchy or kingdom. Pericles held the belief that democracy was the form of government under which prominence grew. Plato was a revered and eventually became well respected teacher in Classical Athens, his way of thinking and his views of a perfect society show him to be somewhat of an idealist more than a realist, as Pericles himself proved to be with his actions and achievements throughout his lifetime. In Plato's time, he valued reason above all else, and through thought, he sought to change the way a city state was run and controlled. Pericles, on the other hand, used his aristocratic background and resources to make lasting improvements on the way of life for the citizens of Athens.

Introduction

Any discussion about the contrasting views of Pericles and Plato predictably comes down to democracy (Fleck, 2002). The Athenian society had been profoundly affected by the Wars with the communities at the time disrespecting law and justice. Both men observed that the Peloponnesian war brought about conflict in political leadership as well as human nature. During this period of war, many people were desperate and anxious to gain power and protect themselves against any danger. Athenians had become greedy and power hungry, as they did not care for the common good of the society (Fleck, 2002). Plato and Pericles both addressed these issues by suggesting various ways through which the Athenian society should be governed. While Pericles believed in democracy, Plato believed in the

conservative republican form of leadership. The views of both these men differed in all areas of life ranging from government, education, division of labor etc.

This paper is an in depth analysis of the views of Plato and Pericles. The paper identifies the contrasting views of Plato and Pericles politically and ideally, highlighting justice, division of labor, liberal policies, education and military training in relation to this.

Justice

According to Pericles, Justice involves freedom for all irrespective of the social standings or sex. Freedom in this case would include freedom to take part in public life as well as freedom to do what one pleases (Kagan, 1991). In his view, when people have the freedom they desire, they tend to have respect for the law. Contrastingly, Plato believed that justice involved the fulfillment of the different functions in society by different people as conforming to a person's nature (Taylor, 2001). He believed that justice involved an individual minding his or her own business while staying away from other people's affairs. He ridiculed Pericles' beliefs stating that at no point will all men be equal. Plato argued that even nature does not provide any basis for human beings to be equal. He states that all men were created with varying degrees of intelligence capabilities, and most importantly, political connections (Fleck, 2002). Therefore, if the society is to be ruled with utmost justice, then all people should accept what has been fatefully consigned to them so as to serve the society.

Division of labor

According to Pericles' rule of democracy Athenians who reject political as well as public life were deemed futile (Kagan, 1991). He argued that all citizens were entitled to taking part in any judgment concerning public and political matters. According to Pericles, the ability to take part in public matters was what democracy was about, and any ordinary citizen irrespective of gender or social standing had the right to this. Plato disputes this notion stating that those people involved in political matters were not on the same level as other ordinary citizens. Most importantly, he argued that not all Athenian citizens would take part in the management of the state of affairs. On the contrary, Plato suggested a society where the divisions of labor and roles are clearly defined among individuals (Taylor, 2001). He argued that it would be unjust if those most suited for certain roles were robbed of these abilities all in the name of democracy (Fleck, 2002).

Liberal Policies

In line with achieving justice, Pericles supports the idea that for Athens to succeed in its endeavors, it must open doors to its foreigners so as to benefit from the harmony achieved by being one with other states (Kagan, 1991). Pericles argued that through establishing this liberal policy, Athenians would gain support of the other nations hence confidence at the war front. This, therefore, means that the success and victory of Athens as a nation largely depended on the support of other nations. Plato disagreed with this notion arguing that citizens would benefit more when they are self-contained and protected from outside predators. He argued that the outside influences

would corrupt the Athenian society by introducing new beliefs to the Athenians that were opposite of their cultures (Fleck, 2002). He goes on to state that the best forms of communism are contained in the less liberal societies who chose to shun any outside influences.

Education

In terms of education, Pericles believed that historical literature was necessary for the success of the Athenian society. He argued that Athenians would be motivated to do what was right by their state if provided with necessary literature regarding their history (Kagan, 1991). Through these books, the people of Athens would then have courage and be forced into daring actions so as to fight evil. However, Plato disagreed with this notion stating that literature would only lead the Athenians into imitation of what was previously done (Taylor, 2001). He argued that Athenians would lose their sense of reality through this literature since most of these works displayed a sense of viciousness that was opposite of the Athenian culture (Fleck, 2002).

Military Training

Pericles argued that Athenians, especially the soldiers, need not be trained about the ways of life as they were encouraged to live as they wish. He stated that Athenian soldiers display more courage than their Spartan enemies because their freedom allowed them to understand the differences between destitution and gratification (Kagan, 1991). However, Plato disputed this idea by arguing that education was necessary so as to obtain a balance between physical training and arts (Taylor, 2001). He states that this

balance is good for the soul as it would prevent the Athenian soldiers from being too callous or temperate. He believed that the Athenian troops should be taken through various trials so as to ensure that during war, soldiers maintain the basic knowledge on what was preeminent for the state (Fleck, 2002).

Analysis

On a closer examination of the contrasting views of these two philosophers, we see that they both sought to bring out the best in the Athenian society. Their conflicting views can be narrowed down to knowledge and the ability to act on the knowledge that each philosopher has been endowed. According to Pericles, knowledge is achieved through public interaction and especially with the citizens of a state (Kagan, 1991). He states that this interaction is essential for any action to be taken as it helps in understanding the problems that the nation faces. Plato, on the other hand, argues that knowledge is related to the real, to what can be seen in the society (Taylor, 2001). He states that only those who have had the experience concerning certain issues have the knowledge pertaining to the issues and can, therefore, act towards dealing with them. However, we see that Plato's arguments were just based on the ideals of what should happen (Fleck, 2002). Plato merely offered options to the Athenian political system by providing a constructive criticism to the current rule of the state. Plato, therefore, fails as a philosopher as he lacked the courage to go ahead and act on his beliefs. Pericles, on the other hand, used the knowledge that he had to improve the

way of life of the citizens of Athens. He relied on the reality of actual events to make decisions through public discourse of the Athenian populace.

Conclusion

In any civilized society, neighbors will eventually disagree and are bound to feud at some point. Wars will inevitably happen; the good in people will show along with the evil. Plato's so called "Utopia" was nothing more than a nonexistent nation that in order to exist would have taken away the very thing that makes us who we are as humans living in a society: reality. His ideas of controlling the nation's families, schools, punishments, and peoples' wages were a great idea, but nothing more than that.

References

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