DIOGENES

Diogenes 206: 7–18
ISSN 0392-1921

Democracy, Values and Modes of Representation

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The Whig notion of history assumes a constant progress in the practice and values of human life, tending towards the emergence of more 'humanistic' goals and achievements. Such a view seems implied in the present project, and it is not to be lightly dismissed. Living standards, technology and science have made a constant move forward, effectively accumulating knowledge. And it is commonly thought that a similar shift can be found in values. Elias for example writes of the emergence of the 'Civilization Process' at the time of the European Renaissance. However in respect of values any vectorial movement seems much more questionable.

First of all, what do we understand by emergent humanisms? We use the term humanism in a number of ways, sometimes for the 'humanity of Christ', sometimes for the secular religion of humanity, at others for the work of those Renaissance scholars who devoted their energies to the study of Greek and Roman classics, in other words to the pagan tradition as distinct from the Christian which had long set them aside. Today the term refers rather to 'human values', which almost come to be defined as human rights and which are often taken for granted but certainly need to be defined (what humans, at what period, in what context? If they are rights, who has the correlative duties?), or to secular rather than religious approaches.

Europeans often see a number of what they consider important contemporary values as going back to the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. Those values are held to include tolerance, hence plurality, and secularism. Secularism is seen as the key to intellectual development as it freed thinking about the universe from the limitations of the church. It is a model that some Islamic intellectuals take as a goal for the modernization of Islam, the key being the separation of the sphere of the church and that of intellectual activity more generally, science (knowledge) and theology which parallels the separation on the political level between church and state. Secularization they see not as the abandonment of religious belief but as the confinement of 'religion' to its 'proper sphere'. God is not dead but lives in his own place, the City of God.

SAGE: London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi, http://dio.sagepub.com
DOI: 10.1177/0392192105052611

What defines that proper sphere is a matter of dispute. Christ declared that his followers should render unto Caesar what belongs to him. That has not prevented many Christians from insisting that politics should be conducted according to Christian principles and in the same spirit. With the fall of Rome the Roman Empire became the Holy Roman Empire; the Pope and Catholic beliefs were an important factor in the politics of many states, and with the coming of the Reformation Henry VIII was still King by the Grace of God and as a result was also the Defender of the Faith. His descendents have remained so to this day. There are even a number of European politicians who wish to define Europe as a Christian continent.

One aspect of the Enlightenment, the emphasis on a secular world view, was undoubtedly good for science. Think of Galileo at the Renaissance. Think of Huxley's debates with the Bishop Wilberforce about Darwinism in the nineteenth century. Even then many people remained committed to what the secularists thought of as fundamentalist ideas. Secularism was not doing away with God but seeing him occupy less and less social and intellectual space. It was accompanied by the disestablishment of many churches, by the confiscation of church property, the secularization of religious schools, the lowering of church attendance, the diminishing use of prayer. Most politicians, most rulers, most countries still make a bow towards the dominant religion, but it is more and more formulaic.

The point is that we would never have reached a situation where secularization was valued, where an Enlightenment in this sense had to take place, had we not been converted to a monotheistic religion. In Europe that religion dominated the peoples' way of life in a very radical way. In every village a very costly church was built, a custodian appointed. Villagers attended on Sundays and listened to long sermons putting forward religious themes, values, rights. There was little space for the secular.

Contrast the situation in earlier China. The religious tradition had no dominant player. Plurality obtained. Indeed Confucianism, while no stranger to morality, pursued a secular approach, rejecting supernatural explanations. It provided an alternative set of beliefs to ancestor worship, to local shrines, to Buddhism. With this plurality, an Enlightenment in the sense of secularization was not needed. Science pursued its course steadily and came into no conflict with a dominant set of religious beliefs. It did not seem to have experienced the same radical shifts as in Europe or the Near East under monotheistic regimes. Plurality and secularization already existed in some considerable measure, anyhow sufficient to allow the development of science and of alternative views.

Of course, even the monotheistic traditions allowed some science and technology to develop. That was especially true with Islam, despite the words of Caliph Omar. The traditions of enquiry in Greece were built upon and considerable achievements were recorded. In Europe three areas were influenced by Islamic enquiry which helped towards a kind of early Renaissance. The main Italian Renaissance itself certainly saw a move towards secularization, a disenchantment of the world, especially in the arts. Following classical precedents the plastic arts and the theatre freed themselves from earlier restraints. Music too developed its secular forms at the level of high culture.

Secularism has been dealt a blow in the Middle East by external interference. Many early Independence leaders were secular. That has ceased to be the case, in India for

example, in China too, certainly the Middle East where the secular regimes have been 'changed' or threatened, and Egypt too has had its difficulties with the Muslim Brotherhood. To some extent this represents a rejection of humanism, more in favour of fundamentalism. The move is partly to compensate for other problems but it has to be taken seriously, in Chechnia, in Ireland, the Philippines, in Gujarat and in so many places where religious affiliation has become of fundamental importance.

It is in this latter secular context that the word has sometimes been used to characterize particular periods in other traditions. Zafrani speaks of phases of 'humanism' in the Islamic traditions of Andalusia and the Near East, when scholars did not devote their entire attention to religious matters but also enquired into the 'sciences' and the 'arts'. He sees the same as happening under Judaism. These periods did not see the rejection of religious beliefs but rather their confinement to a more limited sphere, like the separation of church and state at a political level. On the other hand the entire Confucian tradition of China can be seen as being yet more 'humanist' in this sense, opposed to the creditation of supernatural beliefs, as well as directing attention towards ancient texts. At the same time, a great deal of work in China in the field of the sciences was carried out, as Needham has explained in his magisterial series. It has been claimed that Buddhism has some of the same attributes, involving a rejection of the supernatural.

More recently, the emergence of 'humanism' has been associated by some with the process of globalization which is also seen as one of westernization, certainly not by itself. One widespread contribution to such an interest has been the world-wide movement for Independence after the Second World War. Many of the early leaders of the new nations were of a secular bent – well-educated individuals such as Nehru in India, Nkrumah in Ghana (the first of the African leaders), Nassar in Egypt. They opposed the western colonial powers from whom they won their independence (their 'freedom'), adopting their value-laden slogans in the process of so doing. In the early 1950s I well remember a demonstration in the town of Bobo-Diolassou in the French colonial territory of Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) where an orderly mass of African workers surrounded by French police was demonstrating and holding banners proclaiming 'Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité'.

These movements were supported by the United States and by the United Nations in the name of liberty and democracy, the expression of the will of the people. But at the same time the USA was interested in promoting its own agenda which was dictated by its enormous consumption of oil (Florida alone uses the equivalent of the oil consumed by 60 small countries of the Third World) and by its desire to protect its 'way of life', capitalism, against possible Soviet expansion, even if that was achieved by majority rule. The Middle East in particular suffered. In the course of containing communism and securing its oil, Saikal writes, 'The USA spared no efforts to back, promote and even impose regimes in the domain of Islam which were thoroughly corrupt and contrary to all the democratic and liberal values in defence of which the USA claims to act' (2003: 67). In other words there was a gross discrepancy between the rhetorically proclaimed value of democracy and the actual policy of the proclaimer.

What is clear is that humanism in these latter senses to which I have referred, either a respect for 'human values' or a commitment to the secular, is no recent

invention of modern or western societies. Human values obviously vary according to the humanity involved, but some values are widespread: for example, the notion of redistributive justice, of reciprocity, of peaceful coexistence, of fertility, of well-being, even of some form of representation in government or in other hierarchies of authority, of which 'democracy', as interpreted in the West, is one variety. So too is a 'scientific' approach to the world, which may coexist with the religious attitudes, that is, with those approaches involving a belief in the supernatural (in the definition of E. B. Tylor), or indeed with a more widely held agnosticism which, as I have tried to point out elsewhere, achieves written expression as a doctrine in literate societies but is also present in oral cultures as one element of their world view. This I have tried to demonstrate with the various versions I have recorded of the long Bagre recitation of the LoDagaa of northern Ghana (Goody, 1998: 203ff.).

The fact that values vary by context is obvious enough. But we are constantly faced by declarations of universal 'humanistic' values by politicians and individuals alike, and yet their constant breach in specific contexts. Take two contemporary examples. Laid down in the Geneva Convention are strict rules about the treatment of combatants and civilians captured in war. Recently the US and allied forces that invaded Afghanistan transported a large number of prisoners to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba where the USA has an extra-territorial base and where they are kept in frightening conditions. Declaring that these prisoners of varied nationalities could not be considered prisoners of war and that the Cuban base was not US territory, the inmates were denied full international rights or indeed rights under US law. In other words they were denied 'freedom', access to lawyers, and 'human rights' generally.[1] A similar contradiction took place with the capture of Saddam Hussain on 13 December 2003 after he had been caught hiding 'like a rat', according to one coalition spokesman. Despite earlier protests at their prisoners being displayed on television, held to be contrary to the Geneva Convention, pictures showed the former ruler, who as the commander-in-chief was entitled to be treated as a prisoner of war, having his hair searched for lice and his mouth being given a detailed inspection, no doubt for hidden objects. Such pictures undoubtedly breached the Geneva Convention regarding the public humiliation of prisoners.

The second instance has to do with the recent bombing of Tikrit in response to the death of American soldiers in the neighbourhood, some six months after President Bush had announced the end of hostilities. Such collective punishment, often carried out by Israeli troops in Palestinian communities under their control, is exactly what the Allies protested and acted against during the Second World War when the German forces took collective action against villages and communities after they had come under attack, for example, at the Ardeantine caves in Italy or in the village of Oradour in France. These were considered to be war crimes.

The notions of 'freedom', 'equality', civic participation and 'human rights' are ambiguously associated with that of democracy and are the criteria of 'emergent humanisms'. Clearly there has been some general movement towards greater participation in many parts of the world over recent centuries. But that movement needs to be seen in perspective. Greater participation is accompanied by less participation in practice because the government in which we are participating is more remote. The wider problem comes when democracy is viewed as a universal value of

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192105052611 Published online by Cambridge University Press

which the western world is the primary custodian. Moreover democracy has been frequently restricted in the past. In Britain, voting was somewhat widened in 1832 but women did not achieve the vote until after the First World War, in France much later. Even in the USA, supposedly the epitome of democracy according to Tocqueville, George Washington advocated confining participation to gentlemen, that is, to landowners and college graduates. It was a severely restricted franchise. The concept of democracy refers to 'the rule of the people' standing in opposition to autocracy or even 'tyranny'. The will of the people is determined by elections. In what I call 'full democracy' every man and woman has a single vote and the elections take place at regular, arbitrary, intervals. In that form it is a very new practice, being achieved for women in Britain only after the First World War and in France after the Second.

The notion of the ballot box and of the choice it entails depends upon a view that the choice is free and unencumbered. There are some technical problems about the interpretation of choice, as was remarked in the last US election in Florida, as well as the question of what a majority consists of, by number of votes or by number of states. Secondly there is the concealed problem of coercion, by offering pre-election bribes as in eighteenth-century England. Do post-election bribes count? To what extent are promises part of the process? Differential access to publicity because of political control of radio (as in Russia) or economic control by means of finances (as in the USA) can also limit the optimal scope of freedom of choice.

Our model for democracy and the choice of representatives by election (though by restricted suffrage) comes from Ancient Greece. By the seventh century BCE some of the Greek settlements on the Aegean coast of Asia Minor had become cities (*poleis*) or independent city states, replacing earlier hereditary kingship with 'a primitive kind of democracy' (Pasinli, 1996: 7). In Anatolia the Archaic Period was followed by one of Persian rule which set aside democracy; Persian rule was followed by the Hellenistic Period with centralized autocratic rule. So the situation among the Greeks varied greatly over time; they were not unambiguously to be identified with democracy.

In the West, democracy is not seen simply as one among a number of alternative modes of representation, but constitutes a form of government suitable for introduction in all places and at all times.[2] It is a universalized value in that sense. The object of the contemporary western powers has been to promote democracy and to do away with regimes such as those in the USSR or in Yugoslavia that did not meet this criterion. At Independence in Africa, the colonial rulers insisted on handing over power to elected governments, what in British terms was labelled as the Westminster model, in order to ensure popular consent. In fact these forms of government did not persist, partly because people voted along 'tribal' or sectarian lines. They were followed by one-party rule, deemed essential to establish the new state, and then by military coups. The main political problem for a new state has not been democracy. It has been primarily the problem of establishing central government over a territory that had none before.

Israel was a partial exception (as were India and Malaysia) and is lauded as the only democratic state in the Middle East, though that feature does nothing to inhibit its enormous accumulation of armaments and soldiery to defend itself and threaten others; it has 12 divisions, one of the largest airforces in the world and the nuclear weapons that are forbidden to or frowned upon in other powers. Nor does

it inhibit the frequent selection of former soldiers to lead a civilian government (as in the USA), nor does it prevent atrocities as in the Arab village of Deir Yasin, in the camps of Sabra and Shatila in the Lebanon, or more recently in Jenin on the West Bank. Nevertheless by placing it in the category 'democratic', it is automatically contrasted with the 'corrupt', authoritarian government of the Palestinians who like most other Arabs are considered never to have known true democracy.

What is spoken of as democracy today differs from that practised by the Ancient Greeks. At certain periods, the latter had a restricted suffrage through which their leaders were chosen by secret ballot involving literacy, a marked potsherd. However, Greece was a state based on slavery. As non-citizens slaves clearly had no vote. Christianity is sometimes seen as rejecting the practice of slavery, partly because some early Christians were themselves slaves, partly because there was a national prohibition on enslaving fellow Christians, as was the case in Islam. That idea was indeed purely notional. Recently captured Africans in Angola were sometimes baptised before being sold to the Americas as slaves. And Christians certainly purchased members of other faiths as slaves, in Europe as well as elsewhere. In Malaga in Andalusia slavery existed among Christians even as late as the eighteenth century (Cesares, 2002: 232). There was no problem in buying Moriscos as slaves, even though they had been converted to Christianity; especially after the revolt of 1568, they continued to be defined as Muslims, and were seen as more ardent protagonists than their co-religionists of North Africa (Cesares, 2002: 232). This form of servitude was in no sense surreptitious; it was approved by church and state alike and incorporated in notarial documents. While the importance of the institution had in most parts of the Mediterranean drastically decreased since the classical period, the practice had by no means been abandoned either at a practical or at an ideological level. In the words of Cesares, 'The unfortunate Moriscos did not inspire the least sentiment of humanity, nobody openly opposed their enslavement' (p. 233). After the uprising of 1568, they were sold at slave auctions in the middle of Granada. Slavery and full democracy are clearly incompatible, since the first is exclusive, the second inclusive. But then, the 'democratic' West had a restricted suffrage until recently and the hereditary Crown usually had more weight than the elected Parliament.

A contrast was constantly drawn with the 'despotisms' of Asia, in particular Persia, with whom the Greeks were at war. The latter was a monarchy, with the head of state being appointed by hereditary rule as happened in most European countries until the twentieth century, and even today with the head of state and the upper parliamentary chamber in Britain. That absence did not make those regimes necessarily unrepresentative. In any case, Greeks themselves went through periods of what opponents have called 'tyranny'.

In Ancient Greece, in Rome too, there were major changes in the form of government, which shifted from 'tyranny' to 'democracy', or between a republic and an empire, just as has happened in Africa since Independence. Until the eighteenth century, even later, there was no widely held view that democracy was the only acceptable form of government. There were shifts of various kinds, not necessarily of a violent nature. Sometimes force was involved. It has often been argued that in earlier social formations one found rebellion but not revolution. That is, people rebelled in order to change the incumbents but not the socio-political system itself

(Gluckman, 1955). The validity of that statement is not always clear. But in every society, there were certainly shifts in the mode of government and of representation. Overthrows of the total system according to a prepared plan are rare in earlier societies, especially in pre-literate ones. But there has often been some oscillation not only within states but even between centralized regimes and those tribal ones that are described as segmentary or acephalous. The fact that these latter have no single head (and were acephalous in that sense) meant that of necessity decisions were taken by a consultative process, at least taking account of the opinions of household heads. However, in centralized societies, even if not elected, rulers often have to be approved by the constituent bodies of the kingdom. In the pre-colonial state of Gonja (West Africa), for example, where a system of rotational succession exists (rather like the chairmanship of the UN Security Council), candidates for office often had to solicit the support, perhaps through gift-giving, not only of the senior office-holder but also of their equals. At the installation of a chief approval has to be given by the other 'estates' in the kingdom, the commoners, represented by the Priest of the Earth, and the Muslims, represented by the Imam. Moreover in many kingdoms of the region there exists an organization referred to as 'the young men' through which the opinions of the non-office holders can be expressed (and perhaps ignored). Even paramount chiefs expressly take into account the opinion of others, especially the representatives of various constituent bodies. For example, the paramount chief of the important Asante kingdom of West Africa was known as 'the man who speaks last' since he would listen to the opinions of all the members of his council on a particular issue before taking the final decisions on behalf of the state.

Let me return to consideration of the acephalous organizations. Civic participation is no recent phenomenon, emerging from a background of non-representation. Early tribal regimes were characterized by what Durkheim called segmental societies, what anthropologists call 'acephalous' societies, which featured a reluctance to delegate authority and a constant need of consultation and participation. Their mode of operation was no longer viable with the coming of the state, and it was only then that the problem of representation, of democracy, of civic participation, became an issue. Representation by democratic means is only relevant with the abandonment of direct participation.

This type of society is reported for parts of Mesopotamia by Oppenheim (1964), for parts of India by Thappar (1966), sometimes under the heading of 'republics'; and often it formed the organization behind what Hobsbawm has called 'primitive rebels'. Evans-Pritchard, who carried out the model enquiry into one such society in Africa in the 1920s, namely the Nuer, spoke of them as being marked by 'ordered anarchy'. They were in fact highly 'organized' from one point of view but their position regarding authority figures was anarchistic, in that they refused to endow one person with too much power, except in a particular context, such as war or for a religious performance. Such forms of polity could extend over considerable areas, especially in desert regions, but they were segmental, not at all unified from the standpoint of authority. For more complex systems demanded a greater centralization of authority, either delegated or assumed. It is in these societies that the question of democracy arises, because the problem is one of controlling or being controlled by a central government through chosen representatives. I would not

argue the case for 'primitive communism' but I do recognize that for 'primitive democracy', even if these non-literate societies had no ballot box.

Democracy does present a number of problems even for democrats. Hitler was elected by the German people and he proceeded to turn the regime into a dictatorship. Communist governments, too, that may have been elected in the first place have had in the past no hesitation in setting up 'a dictatorship of the proletariat'. What is an elected dictatorship? It is a regime that has postponed 'normal' elections and suppressed the opposition. But what if it has done so with the consent of the majority? The problem for democrats is that such systems do not allow for electoral change. It is also that democrats allow no system other than their chosen procedures to count as 'the rule of the people'. But that could involve choosing a leader by acclaim rather than by the vote. Political parties, which are implied by an electoral system, have not met with great success in much of Africa where tribal and local loyalties are of greater relevance.

When we speak of democratic procedures, we think of the ways in which the people should be consulted. There are many alternative methods of doing this. In the West, in a system increasingly advocated and in some cases imposed on the rest of the world, the electorate are consulted by secret (usually written) ballot every four, five or six years. The number is arbitrary. It is a compromise between testing the opinions of the *demos* and pursuing a consistent policy over a given period. Some have argued that the public should be consulted more frequently, especially on major issues like the declaration of war, which in Britain does not even require a vote of Parliament because of the fiction of the royal prerogative (yet the adoption of the Euro does!). It is difficult to argue that we live in a democracy (i.e. under the rule of the people) when governments can decide a major course of action such as war against the will of the majority. Should therefore democracy include the practice of recall? Should we be ruled by constant referenda and opinion polls? Or does chaos lie in that direction? It could be argued that democracy is only really ensured by the ability to recall representatives, so that a government about to engage in war against the wishes of a majority of the country could be thrown out. If this 'true democratic' possibility had been available, a number of European governments would have been toppled at the outset of the recent war with Iraq.

However, it could also be argued that some social programmes require a longer period to inaugurate than four or five years, and that a regime should therefore be chosen for a longer period than this. That was the claim in post-Independence Africa, for example, when some elected governments turned themselves into one-party regimes. Of course there is nothing to stop a government from being elected for a number of successive occasions to enable it to carry out a more extensive programme, but what if the electors themselves 'choose' to elect for a long-term or indeed for a permanent government, such as the dictatorships that came into force by popular vote in Germany and in Italy in the inter-war period, or the one-party states in Africa or in the Middle East (of which Iraq was one example)?

If the term 'democracy' refers to the kind of recurrent electoral procedure developed most prominently in Europe in the nineteenth century, it constitutes only one possible form of representation. Most political regimes of whatever kind have some mode of representation. It is perhaps possible to visualize in the abstract an

authoritarian regime that is completely autocratic but if it does not take into account the wishes of the people, its days are likely to be numbered, even in what are called dictatorships or despotisms. Nylan remarks that in early China neither the Ch'in nor Wang Mang probably deserved their reputation for despotism. The classical text itself formed a check and a balance on government. And the literati often found themselves in opposition (Nylan, 1999: 70, 80ff.).

There are a number of situations in which modern states have not seen democracy as universally appropriate. In some parts of the USA, the black population, although a minority, had until recently no right to vote in a country where everyone else was doing so. Nationally they were given the vote. Had they been in a majority, it is doubtful if the white population would have voluntarily done so. It would have remained an apartheid regime as in earlier South Africa. In many countries women were a long way behind men in getting the vote.

In Israel, towards the end of the British mandate, the government wanted a single state solution to the Palestinian question and tried to establish an assembly based on democratic principles. The Jewish population rejected this offer since they were in a minority. Later on, when most of the Arabs had left or been driven out, they established a 'democracy' with reduced rights for those who remained; now those Arabs who had left have been refused 'the right of return', a right that the Jews themselves had loudly proclaimed, but which in this case would have threatened their majority. In religiously, 'racially' or ethnically divided states, one 'man', one vote is not necessarily an acceptable solution; the principle may lead to 'ethnic' cleansing, as in Cyprus or India. Where full democracy is attempted under these conditions, it may lead to a struggle for increased demographic reproduction in order to attain a majority, as many Protestants in Northern Ireland believe to be the case with the Catholics.

Is democracy for example the answer for contemporary Iraq? It could be argued that with heavily divided religious and ethnic communities, one should opt for 'power-sharing' as was recently adopted in Northern Ireland, so that there was no permanent majority of one group (the Shia or the Protestant) over another but rather a 'consociational democracy'. In ancient Greece, the vote was limited to the citizens. The notion of citizenship, often associated with liberal and even revolutionary regimes, may in practice indicate exclusion of the non-citizen. 'Civus Romanus sum' implies that there are residents of the same territory that do not share the same rights, like Turkish immigrants in Germany until recently, or any immigrant or indeed sojourner in Switzerland or in India since they are unable to purchase land or house. Citizenship is an excluding as well as an including concept.

But even within the notion of citizenship, the semi-permanent attachment of individuals to a specific majority group, religious for example, may mean the effective exclusion of other groups. In order to counter a relatively permanent imbalance which virtually excludes the short-term change of vote on which 'full democracy' depends, there may, as we have seen, be a resort to power-sharing to ensure representation (and thus social 'order' or acquiescence). Another 'quasi-democratic' technique is 'positive discrimination' which gives additional privileges, perhaps in a national assembly, perhaps in training, to certain underprivileged minority groups. This procedure has been accepted for the employment of blacks in the USA, and for women under certain 'electoral' arrangements, but the first example on a national

scale known to me was its introduction for certain 'scheduled castes' in the Indian constitution of 1947 which was largely written by Dr Ambedkar, himself by origin belonging to an untouchable caste, and who felt that his community would not receive 'fair' treatment under a Hindu government.

Despite these problems, in today's climate 'democracy' has become a value-laden word. And whereas originally it meant the rule of the people, the meaning has narrowed and it now refers quite specifically to regimes where parliaments are elected every four or five years by universal secret ballot. Even so, the notion has become highly manipulable or manipulated. The Palestinians had an elected leader who offered to submit himself shortly to re-election. On 24 June 2003 President Bush of the USA suggested a peace plan for the Middle East, the first item of which was that the Palestinians should elect a new leader because Arafat was tainted with terrorism. So too of course was the former Israeli Prime Minister, Begin, and some would argue Sharon as well. One may hope for different leaders in a foreign country, but to demand the 'democratic' replacement of elected leaders as a condition of negotiations is extremely arrogant, not democracy at all but the expression of the dictatorial demands of a dominant world power that regards the running of other countries as a legitimate aspect of its foreign policy. In the recent past such a policy has openly supported dictators rather than democratically chosen leaders, and even today has little difficulty in allying itself to monarchical Saudi Arabia or to post-coup Pakistan.

In any case it was futile to follow Sharon in demanding Arafat's exit just as it would be futile for the Palestinians to demand the same of Sharon, or indeed of Bush. Each country has the leaders it has (some would say 'deserves'), some elected, some not. In any case you cannot have a democratically elected leader before you have a state that can separate the political from the military. That situation has not yet emerged among the Palestinians, though they have been formally asking for their own state for some 85 years at least.

One major excuse for invading Iraq was that the regime was undemocratic, but rather a brutal dictatorship. There does not exist any international agreement on the nature of the government a country must adopt. During the Second World War the governments of both Germany and Italy came into power as the result of democratic elections. That was not true of Spain, but the Allies made no attempt to depose Franco after the war, even though he came into office as the result of a military coup and a civil war. So did many of the governments of Africa, some in South America and elsewhere (Fiji for example). On the other hand democracy in the island of Grenada did not prevent it being invaded by the USA, even though it was a Commonwealth territory belonging to its closest ally.

The 'democracy' that exists at home is not always applied abroad. In any case the notional practice operates very differently in decision-making at an international level. In the General Assembly of the United Nations, delegates are chosen by governments and each has a single vote irrespective of the number of inhabitants – one government, one vote. The 18-member Security Council is elected by the General Assembly, with the exception of five permanent members, the victor nations in the Second World War, each of whom has a veto. It is a 'legal' system created by the victors. In that Council, majority decisions do not count. Neither, however, do

minority ones since the dominating powers, and specifically the one superpower, may use their resources, military, economic, cultural, to put pressure on others to vote the way they wish, using methods that would be condemned within a national parliament. In a recent instance the representatives of a number of European countries, including Bulgaria and Romania, sent a letter to the White House approving the US line in Iraq. The representatives of this group apparently meet in Washington and are 'advised' by an American official who has worked in intelligence. It was he who wrote the letter (*Herald Tribunal*, 20 February 2003) and he wrote it on behalf of the states who were candidates for NATO, an application that has to be approved by the US government. It was a decision they made to support President Bush without any consultation of their own people, who would most certainly object. The same is true of Tony Blair who feels no compunction to consult since he has decided his position is the right one, whatever others may think. That is also Bush's position. Moreover those who take an alternative line are not only condemned, that is to be expected. But sanctions of various kinds are taken against them. It was intimated that if other nations did not take part in the war against Iraq, they would have no say in postwar decisions which will clearly be made not by the UN but by the superpower and its allies. Russia, France and China will have no access to Iraqi contracts or to its oil, whose disposition would be in the hands of the victors.

Such discriminatory measures hardly respect the legitimate right and freedom to choose between alternative courses of action, which is basic to democracy and the rule of the people. At a less formal level those measures did not await the end of the war. A discussion on the news programme CNN (20 February 2003) raised the possibility that the US people should give up drinking French wines (in favour of those from Australia, a country giving its support) and that the sales of Mercedes cars would decline. Even the names of dissident countries were taboo; French fries became freedom fries. The dominant position of the USA in the cinema, in TV, in the world media generally, ensures its views are constantly explained in its own terms. There do seem to be arguments of a democratic kind in favour of restricting the ownership and control of mass media to members of the particular population that has to suffer from them, to limiting the role of money (as well as arms) in influencing the people's choice. Democracy rests on the notion of effective 'freedom of choice'. Money clearly affects that freedom when voting is influenced internationally by loans or gifts, and nationally when candidates are chosen from the rich or when drinks are offered to voters. In general the international situation differs substantially from the national. The former secretary-general of the UN recently remarked in an article entitled 'The United States against the Rest of the World' (*Unitá*, 22 April 2003): 'the most important argument can be summarized in a formula inspired by the philosopher Pascal. "Democracy within the United States; authoritarianism outside".'

In conclusion, many Europeans see themselves as heirs to the humanism of the Enlightenment, as well as to the French, American and even the English Revolutions, which supposedly led to a new society, a different way of life. One aspect of this life was democracy. The notion that democracy only emerged as a feature of modern, indeed western, societies is a gross simplification. Obviously Greece provided a partial model. But many early political systems, including very simple ones, embodied

consultative procedures designed to determine the will of the people. In a general sense the 'value' of democracy, though sometimes held in abeyance, was frequently, if not always, present in earlier societies and specifically emerged in the context of opposition to authoritarian rule. What the modern world did was to institutionalize a certain form of election (choice), initially because the people were required to contribute actively to national expenditure in the form of taxes. It was for that reason that Parliament had to be called. Taxation was hardly possible without some form of representation, as the American colonies effectively proclaimed.

The particular forms so lauded in the West are, however, not always the most effective to secure adequate representation; the promotion of the Westminster model, for example, is not a universal panacea even at the national level. At the international one, there is a long way to go before electoral procedures are accepted instead of force or other sanctions. If democracy is to be counted as a feature of 'emergent humanisms', the idea has to be qualified in a number of ways. More important, it represents a claim to values which at a rhetorical (and in particular at a textual) level are considered as universal but in practice are treated contextually and contingently. The gap between stated goals (values) and actual practice can be very great.

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Notes

1. I have to admit that having had these rights largely respected when I was a prisoner of the Fascists in Italy and the Nazis in Germany, I feel strongly on this issue.
2. One of my interlocutors objected to the description of democracy as a form of representation, claiming it was 'a form of culture'. Even where electoral procedures are used in the political sphere, they rarely obtain in other contexts, such as employment or the family.

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