

Our New Society

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Society evolves in much the same manner as did the bear, the bumble bee, and the mangrove. Those that can, survive and breed. Those that can't die off. In our early days, our societies were nearly nonexistent and consisted largely of relatives. Inbreeding was not all that productive and it didn't take long for small tribes to form and exchange members to the benefit of both.

By the time Plato got around to writing down his thoughts on society, he was able to identify five different structures which had arisen from these early tribes: Aristocracy, Oligarchy, Democracy, Tyranny, and Timocracy. As it turns out, the systems of Monarchy or Castes are left out even though dictators, emperors, and kings were common throughout the Middle-east.

In 1789 we Americans rejected the monarchy and set up a brand new system. It was based in freedom but stopped far short of anarchy, which is another one Plato neglected. In fairness, anarchy is more akin to the absence of a societal structure.

In Plato's mind, the Aristocracy was the preferred structure, but in order to appreciate his position, we need to fully understand his definition. The meaning of the word has changed considerably in the last 2,400 years. Back then, being called an aristocrat would be considered a high compliment. Remember that Plato lived in a time where characters such as Hercules were not uncommon. Gods and humans interbred on a fairly routine basis. In Plato's reality, the aristocrat was not just a man, but a man who was superior to others because he had a good soul. In fact, the phrase, 'he has a heart of gold' may well have originated from the Greek view that aristocrats had hearts of gold or silver while lesser men had hearts of iron or bronze. With that in mind, the aristocrat ruled because he was not only superior in mind and spirit, but because he genuinely cared for, and took care of, those in his charge. To Plato, Mother Teresa would have been an aristocrat.

Plato also speculated that failed aristocracies were the result of lesser men, those with hearts of bronze or iron, who infiltrated the ranks of the true aristocrats and wrecked the system. When this happened, the benevolent Aristocracy became the more self-serving Timocracy.

When we rejected the monarchy, we were rejecting a failed aristocratic system. What took its place, we called a meritocracy. Considering that all men were created equal, those whom we chose to put into positions of what was supposed to be

temporary power had to be selected based on the merits of their work, not their lineage or what we suspected their heart was made of.

Unfortunately, our meritocracy has suffered the same fate as Plato's aristocracy. In recent years, and in particular in 2020, people of lesser character and intellect have become prominent through the adherence to what are widely considered to be conspiracies and hoaxes. I won't present a list, because there are even opposing conspiracies and hoaxes. As Fox Mulder said, the truth is out there. It is, however, still a choice as to which truth people choose to believe. There are so many people now who have fallen into power as a result of truth-choosing that I'm tempted to coin a new term for our society as we approach 2021. We may soon live in an "idiotocracy."

We should all spend 2021 going back to what Ed Walter (Timothy Robbins) told Catherine Boyd (Meg Ryan) in the movie I.Q. - "Question everything." It's time to value the truth over winning once again.

I'm not suggesting a return to Plato's aristocracy, but I can tell you this. The problem isn't who's winning our elections. The problem is who's running in our elections.