

Read before reading the paper:

Generalizations are to be avoided if possible, but in a "budget" paper they cannot be helped. So, forgive me, I will read many tonight.

Have you have noticed in these past few years that we have many more questions about our country, our world, even of this very civilized Literary Club, than ever before? I know I have been conscious of it; it could be my age, but I think it is of the times;... I hope? So I trust this will be of interest to the club.

Does Democracy Change Us?

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Charles M. Judd

Today, I think the "western world" exhibits a characteristic behavior that is new (relatively), a behavior common for less than a century. Earlier behavior found fighting commonplace; and most countries were still governed by autocracy, or limited democracy. The separation of people by color was the general practice in the United States and in many parts of the world with a widely shared attitude of tolerance towards servitude of people of little or no education. There were still persons "of" the Stone Age living in Africa only a century ago. Immanuel Kant had argued in his "Idea for Universal History" that the republican form of government was to supersede all others. And an "end-of-history" prophesy by Francis Fukayama was in current discussion. Perhaps it was the fatigue of fighting two world wars that brought us to our senses? Something happened in the west, and that is the subject of this paper

Today our newspapers are full of news from various parts of Asia and the eastern world, most of it is of the contentious, especially in Iraq and Iran, much of it of fighting and killing between religious rivalries, in addition to U.S. killings in Iraq. This paper of mine can't include this since the Moslems of the east, i.e. Asia, don't understand democracy; at least they don't show it. I find variations of their religion in Iraq serve as their political parties; but little or no accommodation in trying to work together politically. In Iran, as in Indonesia, there are warlords or dictatorships, presumably because of these discords. So, I decided that the political dynamics in Europe and North America which have occurred in the twentieth and nineteenth centuries were absent in most other parts of the world.

There are exceptions, of course, such as India, where democracy has been a fact of life since Gandhi's time. Some thirty or more years ago, I became intrigued with India; why would such a poor nation take on Democracy as a form of government? I wanted to know more. So

Jean and I decided on a vacation there, hoping to learn. We joined a British tour group. Swan, and spent almost three weeks in India and Sri Lanka and didn't find any answers but we found a country of great extremes: racially, culturally and financially. The problems of poverty and population were there along with a wonderful culture and art in both large and small communities. We loved our trip but found no answers, only more questions.

Democracy, or rule by the majority, was tried well over twenty-five centuries ago by the Athenians proceeding by several centuries democracy's experience in Rome. There may have been a few tribal groups where rule was determined by lot but no nation until Athens gave personal vote to its citizens. The Greek, or Athens model, was a limited democracy, only those who could prove that both their parents were citizens could vote. So many of those living in Greece, slave or free, could not vote. Athens put everything to a vote.

I find the story that led to the demise of democracy in Athens interesting, but tragic. The citizens of Athens who were allowed to vote were actually a minority of the population. They voted on every little issue, seemingly not trusting their elected officials. Their democracy was so extreme that their democracy came to an end because of this with the end of the Peloponnesian War. Sparta had sued for peace after about twenty years of fighting. The political leaders of Greece advised acceptance, but when the offer was put to a vote, peace was not accepted! So after another ten years of war, Athens lost the war, they lost their right to vote and they lost their independence!

A slightly better form of democracy was tried by the Romans. Most of you will remember the story from either history books or a play, of when Caesar, as a conquering hero, comes back to Rome wishing to rule, the established order is upset, ending both his life and their democracy. (Over simplified? Yes!) There may have been other attempts at democracy, rather than authoritarian rule, in the ancient world but I am not aware of any.

Probably the first time after Rome, that I know of, a time when there was relative freedom from absolute rule and a freedom of thought, unknown of since Greece and Rome, was in southern Spain around the time the first Millennium AD. This freedom lasted only three to four centuries when the Berber Moslems, first, and then Queen Isabella's Christians, spoiled it. About that same time other parts of Europe were seeing changes, such as a beginning to the end of serfdom. We have the Magna Carta in England, a start towards partial democracy, as we all know from our early school history books. But almost full democracy didn't really come until it came to us with our independence from England. Yes, there was a parliament in

England before this with the House of Commons, but their powers were limited At the start of a democratic government in the U. S. the vote was limited, only to land owners, almost. Even today we have a residual from that lack of trust by our founding fathers, they didn't wish the large states to dominate congress so our congress has two Houses, one in which each state is equal, the other house each voter is equal. But each citizen wasn't equal in the eyes of the early fathers, the vote was given only to land owners, we still did not trust Democracy for all until the last century when the right to vote was given to women!

Today, in the western world when there are elections, and the nation is divided with strong points of view being expressed vigorously, by both religious and political minorities, some not being elected, no one takes up arms; "they stick it out" until the next election. France endured Napoleon, Germany endured both the Kaiser and Hitler, and both brought major wars to Europe, but both countries finding a way to democracy eventually. Now we still have a few nations in Eastern Europe, Russia and its offspring mostly, where dictatorship seems hard to die. It will take time, I think, until more of their population feels secure with a trust in the future.

Is Democracy a "natural" attribute of being human? We can't answer that, but I doubt it. Think how we in the West lived, with various systems, but essentially trying forms of democracy. We have had to put our dreams of the ideal man or the ideal way for man to live, into our hopes, our worship or our dreams. We work with education and social agencies, including those of the government, and hope to improve persons, not expecting perfection, and never losing our respect for each person, even if they don't always follow the rules or are different.

We have seen various trials of living in equality, such as the communities started with ideals, such as the town of Harmony, near us in Indiana, just north of Louisville. They, and others like them, maybe four in the United States, thought that people could live together in harmony. The history of such groups, in other countries as well as those few in the U.S, was that when the charismatic leader died and his memory became dim, they floundered.

We have seen other forms of government tried, usually messianic, assured man could be changed, like the readers of Karl Marx. In Russia it was called Communism and it finally died of its inability to produce anything but the same self-centered individuals we are, well that most of us are, all living uniform lives, but living them unhappily. Finally with the fall of the Berlin Wall, democratic ways started to appear, joining the rest of Europe. We hope the people of Russia won't let this hope of democracy die, and that some form of it will, eventually, be the

governments of the eastern nations of Europe. I wish I could say this about the rest of the world, but until those who believe their way is supreme, such as we see in Iran and Indonesia, I have my doubts. But/ maybe Egypt or Lebanon will, eventually.

It is a worry to me that in the United States religious groups with charismatic leaders prophetizing absolute truth and demanding absolute loyalty are flourishing. Our president is a member of such a group. The great historian, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. has written a book, "War and the American Presidency" published in 2004, became so concerned with the presidency that he added another chapter to the book the following year. That Chapter tells of his concern; here is a quote from Page 144, talking of Iraq, "A senior aide commented to Woodward that the president really believes he was placed there to do this as a part of a divine plan".

The secret to democracy is the belief that all persons, no matter how different, are equal! Some will even say that humans have a touch of the divine showing.

So, having said that, I wish to end with a quote from "Ecclesiastes" that may be the first statement of democracy. "I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise nor riches to men of understanding, but time and change happen to all".