

Krisernas Grekland

I politik och litteratur

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The first time I really met a Greek was at the Harvard Graduate Dormitory on Perkins street where I lived upon my arrival in the fall of 1971 until I met my girlfriend in the spring of 1973. Opposite me in the corridor there was a Greek fellow residing, incidentally an applied mathematician, but as there was a huge chasm between pure and applied mathematics at Harvard that corridor was our only channel of contact. He told me about university studies in Athens. The students spend all their time sitting in cafés drinking and talking throughout the fall and at the end of the term they panic temporarily and study frantically for the exams. Obviously he told the story as a cautionary tale describing what he had to escape in order to pursue his studies seriously (as I later realized he had been an undergraduate at Princeton). To me, however, the irresponsible and carefree attitudes of Greek students struck me as very idyllic and I envied them, no wonder as I at the time considered myself as somewhat of a prodigy and lived under high pressures to perform¹. The room-mate of the Greek was a Texan geologist. He spoke slowly in the customary drawl of a Southerner and expounded on the vastness of his home state. Land is cheap there, as there is so much of it, there are counties in Texas bigger than Norway and Sweden. The statement is of course absurd, indicative of the naive ignorance of the average American and in retrospect I regret very much that I did not put him in place by e.g. pointing out that both Sweden and Norway was larger than the state of California, but at the time I did not have such precise facts at my fingertips. Later on at Christmas time when the girlfriend of the Texan had visited him my Greek dorm-mate told me that they did not communicate as was typical of Americans. Their level of interaction was remarkably superficial only once had he noted an embryo to a real interchange having to do with why not men cry but it had not been pursued. He had a girlfriend back in Greece, and of course they made love, but above all they talked. Being a virgin at the time the casualness with which the first was mentioned and the seriousness of the second impressed me in rather different ways. I also recall a few other things that he told me, and in retrospect I may regret that I did not really befriend him, but I also realize that I was at the time far too immature. My second contact with Greeks was much later and much more indirect yet rather instructive. It was through a Bulgarian colleague. He told me that the Greek business community was very much in favor of Serbia during the Civil War, this greatly surprised me at the time, but later I realized that this was yet another indication that above everything else Greece was a Balkan country. And indeed

¹ No doubt a similar attitude was prevalent among students at Stockholm with lots of parties and goings on from which I was barred, just as I may very well have been barred from the carefree life of Athenian students, but things always looks more alluring from a safe distance.

when visiting Plovdiv in southern Bulgaria, from where my friend and colleague stemmed, it struck me as vaguely Greek, the experiences of which were confined to a two week honeymoon in the Greek archipelago almost twenty years earlier.

There are three Greeces, each with an obscure origin and each distinctly separated from each other, with only the Greek language in common. First there is the old Mycenaean civilization known only through archeology and strange scripts of which only one (Linear A) is decoded². This is not mentioned in the book and can be ignored from now on. Secondly there is Classical Greek, by far the most important of the three, whose influence on modern culture and civilization cannot be overestimated. And finally there is modern contemporary Greece, the subject of the book, but only of a regional interest living under the shadow of Classical Greek whose actual relevance to Modern Greek culture can be questioned.

Classical Greek is basically fiction, of course not to be taken in a narrow literal sense. It is of course not made up, but it nevertheless shares most of the features of fiction. Fiction, unlike real palpable life, is characterized by it only being accessible through one channel, in practice through a verbal narrative. Real life on the other hand is characterized by the existence of several channels be it by sight, sound or touch, which all collaborate and confirm each other. This gives to reality a remarkable and also at times mundane solidity. To take one example the Swedish king Erik XIV comes down to us through historical documents but there is also his corpse set in a grave which can, and have in fact, be subjected to physical examinations, which will reveal things not known to his contemporaries as well as corroborate what is known only by rumor as it is. The historians study of history is, as the British historian-philosopher R.G.Collingwood has emphasized, a forensic exercise. Just as in a case of a crime testimony alone is not sufficient it has to be corroborated and complemented by so called technical evidence. As Collingwood repeatedly points out a testimony should never be taken on face value, the question to ask is not what is written or said, but what it could mean, the case of duplicity and outright lies can never be discounted. The same things with historical documents, they are never to be supposed to be accurate, in fact they invariably contradict each other, the task of the historian is to sift and weigh and if possible look for independent evidence not only in the form of written documents, traditionally the only source for historical investigations³. Of course there is plenty of archeological material unearthed on Classical Greece as well as plenty of ruins and objects of arts thrown around, interesting as they may be in throwing light on aspects of Greek civilization not accessible through written documents, they really do not throw much light on what is really interesting in the Classical Greek heritage which is almost exclusively verbal. There are busts that supposedly show the likenesses of Plato and Socrates; whether they really do so is a moot question which very likely will never be resolved. For all intents and purposes Plato as well as Socrates and all the other characters of Greek civilization are fictions. Not, as I have already pointed out, that they did not exist physically at one time, but that fact is ultimately irrelevant. Knowing that a bust

² Which was only possible when it was surmised that the language was Greek

³ Not surprisingly Collingwood was an ardent archeologist mostly concerned with Roman Britain, but nothing he ever wrote on actual history is as interesting as what he wrote on history as such. He made his mark as a philosopher.

really is a likeness of Plato say, will contribute nothing to his dialogues, although of course the sentimental impact should not be underestimated. In fact this is the ultimate fate of anyone whose reputation survives into posterity, meaning known and remembered by those who have never met him or her in the flesh. Thus this applies not only to the legendary figures of the distant past but also to more recent figures as Shakespeare and Goethe⁴. Such people become identified with their legends, because what else can they be identified with when their earthly remains are scattered with the winds. Thus we can only engage with such people imaginatively. However, this does not entail a license of complete freedom, as I never tire to point out imagination can only thrive and create where there are obstacles, and when it comes to historical people, our imaginations must comply with the facts that survive. The less there is, the fewer constraints, the less developed is the picture. Greek Civilization lives only as a narrative not as a physical fact. This does not make it less relevant on the contrary those mental images have had a profound impact on modern civilization as have the Biblical stories, whose literal truth only simpletons consider important. This digression may seem superfluous as what is being claimed may be thought as obvious, yet it is easy to fall into the trap, as the second author does at the end, as I will later explain.

The book concerns Modern Greece as we have already remarked, the origins of which remains in the dark. That the present day Greeks should be the direct descendants of the Classical Greeks is more or less an unfalsifiable proposition although of great sentimental value. It ultimately depends on a close connection between language, race and soil, a trinity making up the notion of a 'Volk' ultimately entitled to a Nationhood. It is a very attractive notion fulfilling deep psychological needs but nevertheless nowadays categorically rejected. One should not forget that although one can speak of a Greek heartland with city states such as Athens and Sparta, there was an extensive colonialization by Greeks, even before the Hellenic period. There were flourishing colonies as far apart as Sicily⁵ and along the coast of the Black Sea, with Alexander they penetrated as far as Indus and became a permanent presence in the Nile delta. It was truly cosmopolitan in extent and not tied to any definite piece of land. The cultural and intellectual development has really no counterpart in history whether before or after and so superior was Greek culture that they saw themselves as truly apart and referred to non-Greeks as Barbarians, not necessarily with the disparaging meaning the word later has acquired⁶. Yet it is too easy to see the Greeks as heroes, the Greek characters who have come down to us through history make up a very thin veneer, which we would not even be aware of would we visit them⁷. Once again our Greek heritage is in the form of fiction. Now the Classical Greek culture

⁴ In the case of the documentary evidence of Shakespeare it is so scant that some people literally think of him as fiction; while in the case of Goethe there is an embarrassment of riches when it comes to documentation

⁵ My first visit to a Greek ruin was in Agrigento on Sicily, and I am still to visit the Acropolis

⁶ In my course on mathematics its history and philosophy I have been asked why I only consider Greek mathematics in the ancient world. The answer is obvious, Greek mathematics was so much superior that any mention of other mathematical cultures would only muddle the waters.

⁷ If you want to get a contemporary feel for say a Greek temple you go to India and visit a Hindi one, in fact the fascination with India is that you still can get there a feeling for the daily life of ancient times.

temporarily metamorphosed into what we refer to the Hellenistic with center of gravity in Alexandria not Athens. But this culture slowly petered out and became irrelevant, while the language of course stuck with the Eastern Roman Empire and the concomitant Greek Orthodox Church, the former surviving as late as 1453 before the Ottoman empire took over and brought about the Balkanization while the latter is of course still with us today. The Greek diaspora remained though around the periphery of the Eastern Mediterranean. Greek was romantically revived in the beginning of the 19th century, but as I suspect, effectively separated from the Classical past, except, once again, through language.

The book is a joint effort roughly divided, one surmises, between the literary aspects, written by the first author, and the political by the second, with a few chapters giving the impression of being a true blend. To the first belongs definitely the tenth chapter discussing in detail the poet Elytis and his work 'To Axion Estes'. It stands out from the rest of the book by its scholarly tone and ambition, and much of the criticism levied against the rest does not apply to this. Basically it could stand on its own. It is somewhat of an heroic effort, as the extended poem is to most people incomprehensible, and one gathers that it has cost the author quite a struggle to get its measure. A large part of its incomprehensibility may very well be intentional, censorship does that to literature, not seldom beneficially, as I have noted before, nothing stimulates the imagination more than obstacles to be overcome. As to the blended parts I suspect they pertain to a discussion of writers on Greece from the international Henry Miller and Lawrence Durrell to more provincial ones such as Göran Schildt and Staffan Stolpe, especially the latter coming in for much praise; but perhaps most importantly a presentation of Greek writers such as the above mentioned Elytis as well as the writer of Zorba - Kazantzakis, and the recent writer of ostensible crime stories - Markaris, and not to forget the expatriate Kallifatadis writing in Swedish. Such surveys and introductions are often very useful, although of course they tend to direct the gaze of the readers away from the book they are reading. One may also compare it to lotteries, where the prizes are lottery tickets to other more extensive lotteries with prizes well beyond the initial capacity. But the driving center of the book is the brief survey of the modern history of Greece as a struggle between the left forces of Light and Good and the forces of the right, of Darkness and Evil.

Let me from the onset remark that those chapters are marred with repetitions which a competent editor could easily have excised. There is nothing wrong with repetitions, they are inevitable in any didactic situation giving a rhythm and an emphasis, but it only works if it becomes clear that the repetitions are intentional, if not it gives the impression of absentmindedness and haste, that what has been written has not been thought out. When you present things to the public you should clean the tables, sweep the floors, and not leave dirty underwear around, and close doors to wardrobes. One of the most egregious examples is a footnote inserted giving the same information as is disclosed immediately further on in the running text. Furthermore it may be enough to mention once in passing that Krugman got the so called Nobel Prize in economics, to systematically prefix his name with Nobel prize winner whenever there is occasion to mention him again is to ascribe to the Nobel committee an amount of divine authority they probably do not deserve. They, like Krugman himself no matter how likeable he may be, are but humans. To submit to authority, real or imagined, may be tempting but need not be public. Then there is another

repetition that at first irritated me, namely the constant referral to 'högerextremistiska' (rightwing extremal) as it is never given a proper meaning and hence reduces to a word of abuse, until I realize that it is used simply as a curse, and that made me realize my initial discomfort in reading. I had assumed that I was reading a written text when I was in fact reading an oral presentation. Curses, which are non-verbal, have no place in a written discourse, but can be very effective in an oral. In fact an oral presentation is much more lively than a written one, and of course a far more natural one. Yet there is a difference. When you talk you give expressions to your thoughts, when you write you form them⁸. With this realization things fell into place, and indeed there emerges a passionate, not to say an indignant account of betrayals and injustice occasionally leavened by slivers of hopes. How accurate and fair is another matter on which the innocent reader cannot pass informed judgement, so let us summarize the main narrative with appropriate comments,

Somewhere you have to start. The author starts with the dictatorship of Metaxas 1936-41. Metaxas was an admirer of Hitler, this does not exactly endear him to posterity, however at the time this was hardly surprising. Collective movements had a high day between the wars. Fascists take their names after sheaves. Individually we can easily be broken, but united we stand strong. This is a formula that can apply as well to the left and the right, be it for the Labor Union or the Nation or both. The Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal reportedly had appreciative things to say about the initial emergence of the Nazis, after all it was seductive. This is not meant to disparage Myrdal only to remind you of the ever present fallacy of anachronism any historian is liable to fall into. That Metaxas voiced enthusiasm for Hitler does not necessarily make him a Nazi, at least not in a technical sense. The distinction may be felt to be too subtle for a short survey, and true there is hardly space to quibble over points. Greece is soon after the war attacked by Italy eager for territorial expansion under the German umbrella. Italian attempts at conquest can easily be discarded as farcical, and will be. There is little reason to assume that Metaxas would have welcomed the attention of Hitler's ally, and indeed the Greek valiantly repulsed the Italian attempt, which does not say terribly much. Then in April 1941 the Germans invaded as part of a general strategic plan. This was an entirely different matter. Metaxas had died before and a general friendly to the Germans had taken command of the army and in opposition to the government of Athens (which one may suppose to have been a loyal successor to the dead dictator in the absence of statements to the contrary) signed a cease fire with the invaders. Such an act can be interpreted in different ways. One may see it as an act of reason in the face of a superior army in order to save bloodshed (the Danes capitulated without a shot, and very little blood was shed in Denmark during the war), or a simple act of treason. The general in question was soon rewarded by a premiership in a government in which the Germans pulled the strings. This points to the second opinion, still there is a large area of ambiguity, cf the case of the Vichy regime, where the general was convinced he acted in the best interest of France. When a country is occupied there is invariably a common bond between the occupiers and the occupied in avoiding blood shed and that everyday life will continue as unhampered as possible. This makes for passive collaboration which tends to be pervasive. This was the case in France, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. It is not heroic but it makes life much more pleasant.

⁸ The American diplomat Kennan expressed it as: I write in order to find out what I think.

Thus, with obvious exceptions, Nazi occupation of Western Europe was not a particularly traumatic experience, life more or less went on as usual. A Nazi occupation can mean many different things. This does not mean that there was not widespread resentment, after all the collaboration is passive and formed under duress, but this is something an occupying power can live with, just as a democratically elected government slumping in the popularity polls has to, and in addition an occupying power does not have to worry about election. But if we are to believe the author Greece was not France and the occupation was a true yoke. This means that there was a strong and violent resistance inviting retributions and a general repression, exonerated by the fact that unlike in Western Europe the invading forces did not think of the conquered people as inferiors but respected them. Classical Greek was idolized by the Nazis, which is hardly surprising⁹ but of course by discounting the idea of the present Greek population being the direct descendants of the Classical Greece, which is probably quite true in any meaningful sense, it could be treated disrespectfully. But in addition there emerged a class of active collaborators. Now the crucial question is who were those collaborators.

According to the author they were of two types. Old Nazis from the Metaxas regime, and people, often of simple backgrounds, seizing the opportunity. Now it is not clear whether the term 'Nazis' is merely a term of abuse or if it should be taken literally? In the latter case we have the spectacle of a dictator intent upon creating a fifth column to sell out his country and fuse with Germany. I know nothing of Metaxas apart from what I am told in the book, yet I find this a little bit hard to take, as noted above Hitler inspired a lot of admiration among many nationalist and collective movements at the time, but that does not mean that they would aspire to be subsumed in his Reich. That would have been a contradiction as the author repeatedly points out in somewhat different contexts. I believe that opportunism probably was the major factor in collaboration and while ideology should not be discounted it only played second fiddle. Now when it comes to collaboration between occupiers and the occupied it mostly concern the military and the police. The occupying force prefers the dirty job to be done by indigenous forces, this was the case in Norway and France and other countries subjected to a mild treatment. Concomitantly with extensive collaboration there was also a vigorous resistance not seen in the West. The country and its terrain lent itself to such an armed opposition. Now with the population so polarized one does expect a trauma not seen in the West. The author does not dwell on it but assumes that any occupation by the Nazis must be horrible, but even in Hell there are different shades of black. The German presence in the Balkans was of a very different tenor than the one in the West involving the presence of much more troops. In Yugoslavia Croatian nationalists opposing Serbian dominance saw an opportunity to further their cause, just as Ukrainian Nationalists exploited the situation during the German invasion of the Soviet union¹⁰. The Greek situation should be compared to other Balkan scenarios, including that

⁹ The author begins his account with the relay of the Olympian Flame from Athens to Berlin to make his point, an innovation introduced by Berlin 1936 and not the only one to have survived from that notorious Olympics and become an integral part of Modern Olympics. Somewhat cynically one may claim that the Berlin Olympics was the first Modern Olympics transforming a mere sporting event to something much grander.

¹⁰ The German forces were supposedly initially greeted as saviors by large segments of the population,

of the Ukraine, to be fully understood. Likewise it is not enough to start with Metaxas and thus give the impression that he came as Pallas Athena freshly out of the brow of Zeus. The Greek revolt against their Muslim overloads in the beginning of the 19th century was an eminently romantic one having inspired countless other nationalistic liberation movements, In fact what comes to my mind is the portrait of Byron donning Oriental garb. Greek Nationalism, which I suspect had a very broad popular support, reared its head repeatedly during the first century of independence. There were various disastrous Balkan Wars leading up to the First World War, and after it there was a disastrous war of attempted conquest at the expense of Turkey, trying to unify all Greek speakers territorially, and ending up in a huge ethnic cleaning with millions of Greeks having to flee their residencies. The attempt was moribund as the Greek speaking populations were spread over a large area having a long tradition of active traders and shippers, a diaspora no doubt flourishing during Ottoman rule, which in retrospect appears rather enlightened and benign although not adhering to our present ideas of democracy. Such traumatic experiences must set its mark, and it is only in this context that the Metaxas dictatorship can be put in perspective and properly understood. One should not blame the author, after all he has only a limited space at his disposal, and cannot afford to get lost in the contortions of a truly Byzantine plot, nor would most readers have the patience of having it disentangled. And for those who persist the suggestions of further readings presented at the end of each chapter should come in timely. So let us concentrate on the central thesis of the book.

Greece during the war was divided by the good guys who put up an armed resistance against the occupying Germans (in short the left), and the bad guys - the collaborators, associated with the right, or the extreme right for proper emphasis. In addition to that one suspects the presence of a silent majority of citizens who took no active part. The Wehrmacht collapsed during the last two years. It always was short on resources and had clearly overextended itself¹¹. That the Greek partisans on their own would be able to repel the German invaders stands to reason, especially as Greece was a marginal theater. But the victory of the indigenous sources was usurped by the British. The British military engagement of the war was for all the bluster of Churchill limited. True they staved off a half-hearted German invasion, their channel still providing enough of a deterrence, but most of their military activity took place in the margins (North Africa or the Far East). Churchill sold it all out to the bad guys claiming to prevent a Communist take over. There are two natural questions. 1) Would it have happened? 2) Would it had been such a bad thing if it had? Those two questions can be conflated into one, namely would Greece have landed behind the iron curtain? Counterfactual speculation in history is a risky business at best and a meaningless one at worst. True, when you have to make a decision you need to imagine the possible ramifications of each alternative, only the one you choose may to some extent be verified, you will never truly know what would have happened had you chosen differently. In life you only know what you could have

but the contempt the Germans showed for all Slavs, potential friends and foes alike, quickly made for disenchantment.

¹¹ In order that the operation Barbarossa should be successful it was necessary that it was a 'Blitz' operation, if it did not succeed quickly it would fail. This must have been clear to the high-command.

missed, never what you have missed¹². There are indications that Stalin did not consider Greece within its sphere of interest, and also that Churchill was aware of that. But that only gave him a license to meddle, and furthermore he may have reasoned that if Greece would come under Communist rule it may voluntarily have entered the Soviet sphere. Churchill was a Cold War warrior and such concerns must have been uppermost on his mind¹³. The upshot is that the rightwing oligarchy has stayed in power since the war and dominated Greek politics, periodically behind the scenes when more liberal political forces were allowed a parliamentary majority by general elections, and openly as during the rule of the junta 1967-74. But most significantly that the military and especially the police remains dominated by the extreme right and works in collusion with the extremist parties that have formed and in recent time acquired a non-trivial parliamentary presence¹⁴. Thus a bequest of the times of Metaxas and the Nazi occupation. I find no reason to seriously question this analysis of contemporary Greece history save for details and further qualifications. Furthermore it is claimed that the present economical quandary is due not to the laziness of the tank and file of the Greek population, but a consequence of corruption and tax-evasions by the rich, many of whom present themselves as nationalists but nevertheless having no compunctions of selling out to foreign interests as long as they also serve their own. Still corruption was not absent during ostensible leftist rule, as under Pasok during the 80's, pointing to a common culture of clientism no doubt going back to Ottoman times and endemic throughout the region.

The author refers to Plato and Socrates as fanatical anti-democrats. As a reference in passing I have no objections to such snide remarks which may be seen as refreshing and throw some healthy doubt on the intellectual divinity of those elevated Classical philosophers, but when the author starts to make a case and construe it as an essential component of Modern Greek society and linking the thinking of the Junta with that of the pernicious influence of the past, he enters onto thin ice. One can take it in many ways, one way is to think of it as character assassination. The problem is that in practice both Plato and especially Socrates are fictional figures, as noted earlier. It would be one thing if they would be up for election or employment today when their different views may be taken together to get an overall assessment of their character as to prediction of future behavior. Now to present the persecution of Socrates as a rightful case of dealing with an enemy of democ-

¹² Gavril Princip can be convicted for the murder of the Archduke and his wife, had he not fired his shots they would not have died, at least not at the time, so much most of us are ready to concede to counterfactual speculation. However, it is not clear that had he not fired those lethal shots there would have been no general War. This is on an entirely different scale as to speculation.

¹³ I recall from school how our history teacher told us that Churchill was considering rearming the defeated Wehrmacht divisions and use them against the rising tide in case had the Soviet advance been even swifter. It was remarkable how quickly German went from foe to friend and ally, as testified by the sympathies during the Berlin blockade in 1948. The Holocaust was almost a forbidden topic until the 60's, the recovery from the disaster of the war being the main focus during the 50's.

¹⁴ The Greek Orthodox church, with some notable exceptions, is also a bastion of the right. The Greek Orthodox Church was the most important source of identity for the Greek community during Ottoman times, and thus this is not surprising, yet it points to a complication as to the progeny of the conservative block in Greek society going further back than Metaxas.

racy and the drastic outcome as a result of a provocation on the part of the old philosopher is just an elaboration of the fiction and as such non-falsifiable and ultimately irrelevant. The Socrates who appears in the dialogue of the Republic is a very different character than the one that is usually presented in the dialogues, namely a strident one who expounds dogmatically on his views as opposed to the modest one who claims that the only thing he knows is that he knows nothing. The essence of democracy is the open argument. The axiomatization of mathematics is not primarily to obtain secure knowledge, that is ultimately a vain quest, but to make your reasoning transparent and to invite criticism, whose object is not rejection but modification and refinement. This tradition started in Greece, God knows why, and apparently nowhere else in the world, and was almost extinguished had it not been precariously preserved by written documents eventually to be revived in Western Society. Democracy today is treated with the reverence traditionally reserved for religion, and to accuse someone for being anti-democratic is tantamount to an indictment of heresy and exclusion from the common fold and to be burned on the stake if only symbolically. Democracy is in the public eye not only associated with election and egalitarianism but even confused with it. But those are only aspects of it and as to the latter it needs to be qualified. What is important is the functioning of various institutions, such as the rule of the law and its faithful and disinterested implementation. Many aspects of democracy are counterintuitive. One example is the rule of law. In most societies throughout history (such as the Chinese) the ideal is that questions of right and wrong should be settled by a wise person, it takes a leap of faith to relegate such matter to formal rules. In fact a verdict of a court has to be based on what can be deduced from the evidence not on what may really be the case. Such a formal attitude to right and wrong clearly goes against the grain of what most people instinctively feel. Yet it has the virtue of transparency. One example is the question of succession of a ruler. It can be done through force, election or by rule of law which in practice means by inheritance. The latter is often denounced as undemocratic, this is nonsense, there is nothing inherently undemocratic about following rules, what is undemocratic is to use force (and shed blood). Now in practice democracy presents many problems and exhibit many contradictions. For one thing in what way should laws be made? The process is of course not legal, as making laws is an extra-legal activity. Of course one may devise rules for making rules, but who makes those rules in the first place? Then there can be no rule of following rules, the enforcement of rules may be done by force (which is inherently undemocratic) or ideally by common consent, in other words by tradition. Traditions are self-perpetrating, you do certain things because this is how it had been done before. This may be seen as stupid, be it as it may, therein lies its strength. Democracy is a tradition, its ultimate justification is itself. Traditions cannot be willed, they appear spontaneously and carry on by virtue of their own intrinsic strength, thus it is not enough to arrange for elections (to divine the will of the people, that evasive abstraction) without the existence of fully entrenched institutions and a living tradition there is no democracy. Democracy is not a fact it is a process. It is a process ultimately founded in humanity and as such eminently fallible. Plato and Aristotle were well aware of the pitfalls of democracy, especially as it is practiced through election. An uninformed mob may elect a tyrant (and whatever there alleged aversion of Plato towards democracy his aversion against tyranny is deeper). Anyone contemplating the quite pos-

sible ascension of Donald Trump to the American Presidency, as is the case at the time of writing, must appreciate such concerns. Democracy depends on the active and informed participation of wise men (and participation of classical Grecian democracy was limited to free men and only worked as far as all of those felt it as a duty to participate actively) from this it is not far to envision the rule by the experts. In the book much is made of the notion of Zorba, the personification of passion which needs the moderating influence of reasoning, without pursuing the matter further and while leaving the impression that it is of particularly Grecian concern when it is quite universal¹⁵. In the same way democracy is a way of balancing, and one may view 'the Republic' as purifying one of the aspects, namely the need for wisdom and what it ultimately leads to. This may be seen as special pleading, and it may very well be one seeing it either as an intellectual exercise¹⁶ or an example of irony, as far as the preservation of Plato's character is concerned; but the moral character of Plato is totally irrelevant to his views. A fictional character is defined and made interesting by his or her views not the other way around. The most interesting part of Plato is his well-formulated expression of the basic principles of Greek innovation as to democracy, the transparent argument, and that along with its validity is independent of Plato as a private individual. The strength of an argument is to be found in itself not in its originator or its advocates and proponents, a distinction that most people do not seem to appreciate. This separation between person and views lie at the very heart of the democratic notion of egalitarianism (as well as formal rules should apply to everyone equally). In particular whatever a junta member as Papadopolous may think of Plato has no bearing on Plato and his philosophy, although I admit that it has a certain curiosity value.

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¹⁵ admittedly a concession to the latter is made by a reference to Nietzsche and his 'Birth of Tragedy'

¹⁶ The ultimate tool of mathematical reasoning is the reasoning by contradiction in which an imaginary world is created whose purpose is final annihilation