

# *Equality: The Greek Historical Experience*

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THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN experience with the notion of equality was short-lived. It hardly survived into a time when it could be influential in the development of Western history. The chief interest for us in the Egyptian notion of equality lies in the kinds of questions about the nature of equality raised by and involved in the Egyptian experience. That experience stretched over a period of three thousand years though little of Egypt's history gave evidence of much awareness of the idea of equality.

The history of Greek conceptions of equality was very different from that of the Egyptians for a number of reasons. It was different, in the first place, because the Greeks came into the light of history with a style of life and a set of political institutions which were much more equalitarian than those of the Egyptians. Moreover, the Greek political experience was such that the notion of equality came to the fore relatively early and dominated Greek political debate down to the Roman conquest and absorption of Greece. Finally, the Greeks, almost instinctively theoretical and philosophical, sought to clarify and rationalize the basis of political behavior and as a consequence left behind a large body of political theory. This body of political theory has had an enormous influence on the development of political ideas and political institutions in the Western world. Alfred North Whitehead once observed that all Western philosophy was but an extended footnote to Plato. It would be almost as accurate to observe that all Western political theory is nothing more than a footnote to Plato.

A culture distinctively Greek began to emerge in the Mediterranean world with the onset of a series of "invasions" from the North. One should not think of these "invasions" as systematic intrusions into the already populated area of the Greek

mainland and the islands but rather as a kind of tribal drift southward. These "Dorian" tribes which destroyed and displaced Mycenaean civilization about 1200 B.C., like the Hyksos who invaded Egypt, carried a new technology, the smelting of iron, and new weapons into the mainland of the Greek peninsula, the coast of Asia Minor and the Aegean islands. The process of displacement of and assimilation with the peoples and culture who had earlier occupied Greece was a slow one and the "dark age" which followed on the conquest of Greece lasted until about 800 B.C. This period has often been compared to the early feudal period of Western Europe even though it lacks some of the characteristic institutional forms of feudalism.

This period, as was the case with the feudal period of Western Europe, was filled with contradictory social tendencies. The basic political structure was one which evolved from the warrior band. Those who are familiar with the Homeric epics realize that even among the gods there is both hierarchy and an essential collegiality. Zeus, to be sure, is the great God but it would not be short of the mark to say he is the first among equals; that indeed the will of the gods is one which manifests itself in contradiction, division and confusion. The council of the gods is like the council of the warrior band. The issues are discussed and debated and occasionally a consensus is achieved.

As with the gods, so with the men. Kings there are and chieftains but their power is limited and is dependent upon consent. Ultimately, power is derived from leadership in battle (*Iliad* XII, 307-321):

Thus did the god-like Sarpedon feel impelled to assault the wall and break through the battlements. He turned to

Glaucus, Hippolochus' son. "Glaucus," he said, "why do the Lycians at home distinguish you and me with marks of honor, the best seats at the banquet, the first cut off the joint, and the never-empty cups? Why do they all look up to us as gods? And why were we made the lords of that great estate of ours on the banks of Xanthus, with its lovely orchards and its splendid fields of wheat? Does not all this oblige us now to take our place in the Lycian van and fling ourselves into the flames of battle? Only so can we make our Lycian men at arms say this about us when they discuss their kings: 'They live on the fat of the land they rule, they drink the mellow vintage wine, but they pay for it in their glory. They are mighty men of war, and where Lycians fight you will see them in the van.'"<sup>1</sup>

And ultimately the power of leadership is derived from consent. We can see the process of consultation and consent at work in the great councils or assemblies described by Homer in the *Iliad*.<sup>2</sup> It is useless to look here for constitutional forms or political theory. Men act long before they explain or theorize and the forms of their actions are dictated by immemorial custom. The meeting of the assembly, its organization and conduct and the character of its debates are determined by *themis*, meaning "institution, custom or tradition."

Within the warrior band the forms of political and social converse are remarkably egalitarian. Achilles confronts Agamemnon and debates with him directly. Common ancestry (often mythical), and kinship are a most important source of this tribal equality. The basic unit in the society was the family, inclusive of the household, and the whole of early Greek society is permeated with notions derived from kinship.

Leadership in battle, common ancestry and kinship are important elements in the determination of both hierarchy and equality but they are not the only sources of the Homeric social and political order.

Nearly as important as a basis for power and authority in the assembly is the demonstration of surpassing strength, beauty and intellectual ability (*aristos*).<sup>3</sup> These qualities are so determinative that they can be challenged only by someone equally aristocratic. Excellence (*areté*) is the ultimate source of power and authority. Consequently in the *Iliad* when the vulgar Thersites challenges Agamemnon the demagogic democrat is described by Homer as lacking the physical and intellectual excellences which are the necessary marks of aristocracy (*Iliad*: Book 2; 316-319):

He was the ugliest man that had come to Ilium. He had a game foot and was bandy-legged. His rounded shoulders almost met across his chest; and above them rose an egg-shaped head, which sprouted a few short hairs.

Homer's intentions are clear. Debate in the assembly can only take place among equals and equality is defined in terms of excellences both of endowment and achievement. Breeding, training and discipline, and achievement are the sources of honor in the aristocratic society of early Greece. All aristocratic societies are dominated by notions of "appropriateness" of behavior. Tradition and custom fix the limits of action. Tradition and custom determine too the hierarchical ranks within the social structure and the behavior appropriate to each of these ranks. Duties and obligations are fixed by personal bond rather than legal instrument and all actions are governed by what a later feudal order called "courtesy" but which is best described as appropriateness. Honor is the highest value in the society and one's honor is measured by the degree of excellence one achieves. Excellence and honor are not and never can be won by rational compromise, the typical political forms of equalitarian and democratic societies. An aristocratic ethos demands a heroic commitment. Anyone who has taught Homer to American undergraduates knows how foreign and strange this ethos is to our contemporaries. The

man who sacrifices everything in order to secure the one great prize; he alone is an aristocrat. In the course of time this conception came to dominate all Mediterranean civilization, and eight hundred years after Homer, St. Paul wrote (I Corinthians: 24-27):

You know well enough that when men run in a race, the race is for all but the prize for one; run then, for victory. Every athlete must keep all his appetites under control; and he does it to win a crown that fades, whereas ours is imperishable. So I do not run my course like a man in doubt of his goal; I do not fight my battle like a man who wastes his blows on the air.

Werner Jaeger summed up these values when he wrote:

The presuppositions of aristocratic civilization are fixed residence in one place, ownership of land, and respect for tradition. These are the factors which allow a set form of life to be transmitted unaltered from one generation to another. But to them must be added "good breeding"—a conscious education of the young towards the aristocratic ideal, under the severe discipline of courtly manners and morals.<sup>4</sup>

In the society of the Homeric world as in aristocratic societies generally women occupy a position of central importance. Beauty, chastity and effective management of the household are the excellences which characterize the Homeric woman. Never again in all of Greek history did women enjoy such a high position or participate so fully in the life of the community. Helen is viewed with contempt because she does not exemplify fully these excellences. Although there are bedmates and slave girls in plenty in the pages of the Homeric poems, these women stand outside the established pattern of marriage and kinship relationships. They do not threaten the pattern of inherited worth and "good breeding." In aristocratic societies generally the sexes are unequal and yet women hold a higher posi-

tion than they do in more equalitarian societies. However they do not hold this position as a group but as wives, mothers and members of a kinship structure.

In the history of any idea the historical reality is far less important than what men have thought the historical reality to have been. For the Greeks of all later time Homer was both the historical reality and provided the model by which later realities were measured. Homer was the preceptor of Greece. In spite of all the later shifts in Greek society, democratic revolution, Sophist criticism of accepted and traditional values and institutions, class warfare and revolutionary frenzy, the values of the Greek intellectual and cultural elite remained aristocratic in much the same way that the social values of England have been permanently marked by aristocracy. Alexander the Great, at the very end of Greek political dominance reenacts the Trojan war. More importantly he reenacts the value system of Homeric aristocracy. Plato and Aristotle in their political and ethical commentary seek to revive and reinforce the aristocratic ethos of the Homeric heroes. The world of the founders always exerts a compelling influence on later conceptions of political and social order. Consequently the historicity of the Homeric poems is of relatively little importance.

Homer looked back to an idealized if not idyllic past. His contemporary, Hesiod, described the stern reality of the present. We ought never to be surprised at the difference between the ideal and the practical reality. The difference does not mean that the ideal is defective but rather that the human reality is recalcitrant. The warrior society which Homer painted in such bright colors is immediately ancestral to Homer's and Hesiod's own day and survives in important respects into their time. The reality is far from the ideal as Hesiod tells us in *Works and Days*:

After this, Zeus of the wide brows  
established yet one more  
generation of men, the fifth, to be  
on the fertile earth.

And I wish I were not any part

of the fifth generation  
of men, but had died before it came,  
or been born afterward.  
For here now is the age of iron. Never by  
daytime will there be an end to hard  
work and pain,  
nor in the night  
to weariness, when the Gods will send  
anxieties to trouble us.  
Yet here also there shall be some good  
things mixed with the evils.<sup>5</sup>

This fifth age is a time of troubles, of perversity, dissension, hatred and scarcity. Honor, the mark of the aristocratic warrior has been replaced by shame, envy and vileness. This myth of the five races of descending excellence was no doubt a part of a widespread Near Eastern myth of the regeneration of time. Certainly the classical writers held Hesiod's myth to be the *locus classicus* of the myth of the age of gold. However, for Hesiod the myth is less an effort to detail how time can be regenerated and the world returned to "the golden generation of mortal people" than it is, like Hesiod's myth of Pandora, an account of how present evils came upon the world. In Hesiod the myth of the age of gold does not serve to strengthen the argument for the equality of men by presenting the picture of a time, *in principio*, when all men were equal, and hatred, labor and envy were unknown.

The social reality for Hesiod is clear enough and corresponds fully with the picture we derive from other sources.<sup>6</sup> The exalted courtly position of women which Homer depicted is pushed aside by the myth of Pandora to whom Zeus gave "the name of woman" and the gods intended "to be a sorrow to men who eat bread." So much for sexual equality.

The great bulk of the population were peasants living by subsistence agriculture on small farms. While not serfs in the medieval sense these small and vulnerable farmers were hardly free and stood in a relationship of dependency to the "gift hungry barons," or as Richmond Lattimore translates Hesiod's lines,<sup>7</sup> "those barons who eat bribes." To understand the

peasants' position we must remember that the baronage was magistrate, interpreter of the law, police officer, priest and commanding officer in time of war. The gulf between the baronage and peasantry was complete. Hesiod was no revolutionary and accepted the social order as he found it. Like his contemporaries he was inured to his condition by immemorial custom and by the necessity of clientage in a lawless world.

Nonetheless, the sense of the injustice of present conditions and the harshness of the social reality is very much alive in Hesiod. He appeals to Justice who "herself is a young maiden / She is Zeus's daughter." He tells the barons in the fable of the hawk and the nightingale that the animal world in which the stronger prevails and the weaker is eaten is not the world of men. In the world of men Justice rather than power, envy, and cruelty will ultimately prevail (*Works and Days*: 265-274):

The man who does evil to another does  
evil to himself,  
and the evil counsel is most evil  
for him who counsels it.  
The eye of Zeus sees everything. His  
mind understands all.  
He is watching us right now, if he wishes  
to nor does he fail  
to see what kind of justice this com-  
munity keeps inside it.  
Now, otherwise I would not myself  
be righteous among men  
nor have my son be so; for it is a hard  
thing for a man  
to be righteous, if the unrighteous man  
is to have the greater right.  
But I believe that Zeus of the counsels  
will not let it end thus.<sup>8</sup>

No Hebrew prophet ever spoke more eloquently of the justice of God than did Hesiod. True, there is no attempt to transform the political or the social order, there is no appeal to rights based upon a demand for equality, but there is an assumption that the justice of the Gods does not respect the social status of persons. That is a major first step to the attainment of all other types of equality.

In the three centuries from 800 to 500 B.C. major changes were taking place in Greek society. These changes were of such a nature as to emphasize the demands for justice and to throw into question the practices and values of the earlier aristocratic society. Three factors contributed to the disruption and the displacement of the old order. They were the growing literacy of the population, the invention and spread of coinage and the development of a new style of warfare based on the "hoplite" infantry. Each of these factors directly influenced the developing ideas of equality.

The society of the Bronze age was an illiterate society. In the general revival of trade which followed, strong orientalizing tendencies influenced the Greeks, especially those living in or having contact with the Ionian Greek cities of Asia Minor. These "orientalizing" influences reached their peak in the century 750-650 B.C. Paralleling other oriental influences was the revival of literacy traceable in graffiti, vase inscriptions and designations of ownership in the seventh century. We are not surprised to learn that increasing literacy was accompanied by demands for a written law, and the establishment of fixed penalties for transgression becomes common in Greece. We know of such law codes at Locri, Rhegion and Athens in the seventh century. Until there is a written law which can, at least in theory, be known by all and in which all share, arbitrary judgment will be suspected, even if in fact, it is not the case. Literacy always tends to dissolve claims to status based on birth and physical prowess and substitute for them status based on intelligence and orderly procedures. It can be argued with some justification that the maintenance of an aristocracy of birth is impossible in a literate society.

Not only did literacy serve as a solvent on the forms of aristocratic society but it transformed men's abilities to conceive of the self. The individualizing tendencies of literacy are clearly apparent in the new personal poetry of the seventh century, particularly the poetry of Archilochos, (born c. 700 B.C.). The perception of the

self as distinguished from the social units of family, clan and tribe appears to be one of the major elements in all claims to a radical equality. Of course individualism may result in claims to elite status rather than equality but when individualism confronts an aristocracy of birth its claims are nearly always couched in the language of equality.

The revival of literacy takes place just prior to the introduction and widespread use of coinage. By the end of the seventh century coins have appeared and in the course of the early sixth century they become widespread in the Ionian cities. By the fifth century coinage is common throughout the Greek world. While there is widespread debate among historians concerning the social and economic impact of the introduction of coinage,<sup>9</sup> several generalizations seem justified.

The noneconomic or "ethical" functions of money should not be overlooked. The coin which bore the stamp of the city served an important civic function. Coinage, just as written law, enforced norms known to all. Its purpose, like the purpose of the written law, is to remove the affairs of the community from arbitrary interpretation.<sup>10</sup> However, coinage transforms community even while it strengthens and rationalizes it. Historically money economies have been the single most powerful solvent of all status societies and traditional institutions. The possession of money mitigates any inherent superiority of birth. To the lowly born as to the high born money gives the same assurance of the ability to command goods and services. Money guarantees, in fact, an equality which can otherwise be claimed only in theory. While it cannot be conclusively demonstrated, the revolution in politics of the sixth century in archaic Greece surely must have had an important relationship to the economic revolution which was then in progress.

Finally, in military organization the disappearance of the aristocratic single champion and the development of the "hoplite" infantry transformed the basis of power in archaic Greek society. We do not

know how or when the aristocratic single champion was replaced by a phalanx of heavy-armed infantry. The democratization of warfare leads inevitably to the democratization of politics. Aristotle who studied the development of Greek politics historically noticed the link between the revolution in the art of war and the shift in Greek politics. In establishing the rule in the *Politics* that government should be confined to those who carry arms, Aristotle points out the relationship between popular armies and democratic politics. He writes (*Politics* IV, 12976 9-28):

But to secure gentle treatment for the poor is not an easy thing, since a ruling class is not always humane. And in time of war the poor are apt to hesitate unless they are fed; when fed, they are willing enough to fight. In some states the government is vested, not only in those actually serving, but also in those who have served; among the Malians, for example, the governing body consisted of the latter, while the magistrates were chosen from those actually in service. And the earliest government which existed among the Hellenes, after the overthrow of the kingly power, grew up out of the warrior class, and was originally taken from the knights (for strength and superiority in war at that time depended on the cavalry; indeed, without discipline, infantry were useless, and in ancient times there was no military knowledge or tactics, and therefore the strength of armies lay in their cavalry). But when cities increased and the heavy armed grew in strength, more had a share in the government; and this is the reason why the states which we call constitutional governments have been hitherto called democracies. Ancient constitutions, as might be expected, were oligarchical and royal; their population being small they had no considerable middle class; the people were weak in numbers and organization, and were therefore more contented to be governed.<sup>11</sup>

It was clear that superiority in battle

could be achieved by the heavily armed infantry. Since warfare has always been the chief social activity of mankind it was only a step from this discovery to the revolutionary transformation of ancient politics in an equalitarian direction.

The survival of aristocratic political ideals and institutions into the new world of the sixth and fifth centuries is best expressed in the social and political institutions of Sparta. Sparta retained down to the decadence of the Spartan state the political forms, the clan system of government and many other peculiarities of the Homeric age.<sup>12</sup> Although the structure of government was said, by Plutarch among others, to have been devised by a mythical law giver, Lycurgus, the government of Sparta was probably a combination of ancient institutions and modern experience. The continuation of Sparta's ancient institutions into a more modern period was based upon the fact that Sparta subjected and incorporated into herself extensive territories and a large servile population who throughout Spartan history constituted a menace to the Spartan state. This process of annexation involved a group called perioeci, or provincials, who enjoyed personal freedom and a measure of self-government but who had lost their political and military independence, and the "helots" who were, in fact, state slaves. Spartan institutions reflected a most basic and widespread inequality within Sparta. The basic structure of Spartan society consequently antedated "the constitution" and the revolutionary changes which gave rise to the constitution. The poet Tyrtaeus who was contemporary with Sparta's mid-seventh century war with Messenian helots tells that Sparta fought a desperate war for nineteen years to suppress the Messenian revolt. In the course of that war Sparta was forced to introduce the hoplite infantry and consequently to transform her constitution. The land of Laconia was divided into lots and each of the 9,000 Spartites who served as hoplites was given a lot. Moreover, real political power resided in an assembly composed of these Homoioi or "equals." They were organized according

to tribe and ward, they ate at a common mess and were given a common education. They were forbidden to engage in servile labor or trade and they became, in fact, a popular aristocracy. The women were, as in aristocracies generally, characterized by both great freedom and high status. The assembly elected the council and the *ephors* (or executive committee). The assembly, however, could not act on any measure which had not previously been discussed by the *ephors* and the council. The heads of two aristocratic families served jointly as kings though their role was increasingly ceremonial and liturgical. Thus in the Spartan constitution with its peculiar balance between aristocracy and democracy, hierarchy and equality, one can see the remnants of the earliest political institutions of Greece. The Spartan constitution sought through the strengthening of the role and powers of the community to check the drift to individualism implicit in democratic societies. In this effort they were successful for several centuries and for this reason Sparta remained the ideal for those who feared the drift of democratic societies into moral anarchy and political chaos.

It should be noted here that a measure of equality is not incompatible with stern and puritan measures of social discipline. From Rousseau to the present many have believed that democratic societies can survive only if they are characterized by simplicity of life and "republican virtue." In this matter Sparta has always served as the great exemplar. A democratic society characterized by a strictly circumscribed liberty is one of the enduring models for the organization of political order.

The process of rationalization which we can see evidenced in the theology of Hesiod, the invention of a money economy, the growth of literacy, the transformation of the art of war and the development of written legal codes are all connected to the development of the polis or city state. Rationalization is an essential aspect of the movement from the household to the community. Arbitrary will and unwritten custom sufficed for the government of the

household; a rational order which reflects the needs and the rights of all within the community of the polis is the *sine qua non* of the emerging society of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.

This rationalization of the religious and the social order did not take place quietly and easily. Beginning in the eighth century there is the onset of a series of struggles which last for the next three hundred years between the aristocracy and the lesser orders. At first these struggles involve the administration of justice. As economic conditions improved, freemen of low birth increasingly challenged the arbitrary judicial power of the nobles, a power frequently misused for political and economic ends. The intellectual principle which animates the demand for a written law is the principle of justice or *diké*. *Diké* is seen to contrast with the earlier conception of *themis*. The power of the aristocracy derives from the fact that Zeus gave the Homeric kings "the scepter and *themis*." The etymological root of *themis* means institution. That is to say the feudal lord sitting as judge is the institution of Zeus. To be sure he derives his rules from his knowledge of the customary law but it is he who discovers what the law is.

The concept of *diké* is no less old than the concept of *themis* though its derivation is less clear. Werner Jaeger writes:

...the parties to a dispute were said to "give and take *diké*," so that the word contained the ideas of determining and of paying the penalty. The guilty man "gives *diké*," which originally meant "makes compensation" for his act; the injured party, whose rights are reestablished by the judgment, "takes *diké*," and the judge "allots *diké*." Hence, the fundamental meaning of *diké* is much the same as "due share." Besides that, it also signifies the lawsuit, the judgment and the penalty; but these meanings are derivative, not primary.<sup>19</sup>

"Hubris," or "overreaching" is the violation of the order which invokes *diké*.

It is important to underline one important aspect of the concept of *diké*. *Diké* in-

sists that all men are subject to the law. The principle of the paramountcy of the law, that kings reign but do not rule (only the law rules), that the law is no respecter of persons; this notion, derived in our own legal tradition from the Western medieval experience, may safely be said to be one of the chief sources of the idea of equality. One may venture the question of whether or not one can really advocate equality without at the same time insisting on the systematic obedience to the law by all men.

Even more important for the development of equalitarian thought was the fact that *diké* contained the idea of equality. Compensatory justice, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," is rooted in the belief of the essential equality of the members of the community. What the Greek revolutionaries demanded was an equal standard. Just as they demanded fixed standards of weights and measures, so they demanded a fixed legal standard, a norm before which all were equal.

Of course it is the character of all movements which aim at rationalization that they become mechanical and that the tests of rightness and justice leave out of consideration all those messy but essential distinctions which enable mankind to define and pursue the good life. The anti-democratic and anti-equalitarian criticism of Greek institutions by Plato and Aristotle is aimed at the mechanical application of the idea of equality and the moral disruption which necessarily follows from it.

The practical impact of these equalitarian ideas and democratizing forces is clearly seen in the development of Athenian political life.<sup>14</sup> Athens, as was the case with the other Greek cities, had undergone both economic development and the increasing impoverishment of the lower strata of its citizenry. After a long period of class conflict a remarkable social and legal reformer appeared on the scene in Athens and in 594 B.C. initiated a social and constitutional reform. Although Solon was himself well born his sympathies lay with the poor and the dispossessed. Plutarch tells us that he pleased neither the rich nor the poor. He displeased the rich by remit-

ting debts and he displeased the poor because he did not proceed to the confiscation of land and the equalization of land holdings. Solon made such changes as were necessary for the survival of the polity but not so great as to endanger the stability of the city.

The precise conditions which provoked unrest and brought about Solon's reforms are unclear: There is agreement that a substantial number of Athenians had, through indebtedness become sharecroppers and were in danger of being sold into slavery. Moreover, internal political issues gave rise to demands for systematic constitutional reform so that the power exercised by the aristocracy would be more widely shared by all free men.

Solon's reforms remitted debt and restored to its owners land which had been mortgaged to the rich. Serfdom and slavery due to debt were abolished for all time. Those who had lost their freedom because of debt were brought home from abroad. The stakes marking the mortgaged lands were pulled up. The amount of land an individual might own was fixed and sumptuary legislation was passed so that the differences between rich and poor would not be publically manifested. The export of grain from Attica was forbidden and the crafts and manufacturing were encouraged.

The Solonian constitutional reforms redistributed power within the polity. Justice was made more accessible and all shared in the administration of justice. Solon introduced the principle of 'isonomy' which Sir Ernest Barker describes<sup>15</sup> as a "general rule of balanced equality under which no class could either parade a claim of social superiority or enjoy undue political privilege."

Solon himself praised his own work in an elegiac poem which Barker has translated:

I gave the people such power as sufficed, neither taking from their due honor, nor giving yet more than was due: I gave heed that men who had influence and were famous for their wealth should suffer nothing unseemly:

I stood, with my shield held aloft, to guard both the rich and the poor, nor did I permit either to triumph wrongfully.<sup>16</sup>

In both Sparta and Athens the social and political commotions of the sixth century make the links between equality before the law, political equality, and equality of condition clear. The constitution of Sparta ascribed to Lycurgus goes further toward the establishment of equality of condition than does the Solonian constitution of Athens. Nevertheless both constitutions pose the question of the degree of equality of condition necessary before political equality and equality before the law can exist for the first time. That question is one of the major unresolved questions of our own time.

The reforms of Lycurgus and Solon were not made in the name of political theory but rather as a matter of practicality. Their pragmatism raises a further question of some importance. When a certain level of political awareness has been reached in any society is it not just possible that the assumption of equality is necessary for the continued functioning of the state? To put the question in other and more contemporary terms, would any state based upon the principle of inequality (or aristocracy) be functional in our present day world? Is it not essential that some measure of equality exist or, at the very least, that the rhetoric of equality be employed in political discussion?

At the same time that these pragmatic social and political equalitarian systems were making their appearance other and more theoretical justifications for the idea of equality were being invented. In Ionia, on the Greek edges of Asia Minor, a revolution in thought was taking place. The Ionian revolution was the beginning of systematic Greek theorizing. Those "pre-Socratics" were the predecessors of the great speculative minds of a later century. Thales (c. 585 B.C.) was a contemporary of Solon. He and his fellow speculators argued for the existence of a basic substratum of matter, a primeval stuff

from which all things were made. Xenophanes, Anaximander, Parmenides and Heraclitus refined and etherialized these original inductions and theorized that law and being were to be known not through reflections in nature but rather through insight into the depths of the soul. It is for this reason that the conclusions of the Ionians did not apply to physical nature alone but were, above all, applicable to the world of man.

The political implications of these theories are especially important as they were developed in the thought of Pythagoras, an Ionian from the island of Samos (c. 530 B.C.). Pythagoras settled in Southern Italy and there he founded a school. Pythagoras idealized the conception of physical nature, as did the other Ionians, by arguing that basic unity of the elements was provided by number rather than matter. Number as conceived by Pythagoras is qualitative rather than quantitative. Moreover, the mathematically harmonious relationships and proportions which Pythagoras observed in the world of physical reality were posited by him to exist in the human and moral worlds as well.

The implication of the Pythagorean theory of numbers for the idea of equality is succinctly developed by Sir Ernest Barker:

...Justice was a number...it was a number multiplied into itself, a square number. A square number is a perfect harmony, because it is composed of equal parts, and the number of the parts is equal to the numerical value of each part. If justice is defined as a square number, it follows that justice is based on a conception of a State composed of equal parts. A number is a square so long as the equality of its parts remains: A State is just, so long as it is distinguished by the equality of its parts, and justice is the preservation of such equality.<sup>17</sup>

These ideas, as those who have read Plato's *Republic* know, had a profound influence upon Plato. No doubt they were generally influential in Greece and helped

to provide a rationale for the equalitarian movements of the sixth century.

Equality conceived as an aspect of a justly ordered society and equality conceived as a right possessed by the individual and rooted in nature have always existed in tension in every society which follows the path of increasing democratization. The growing individualism and hedonism of Greek life and thought particularly as it was expressed by the Ionian poets stood in sharp

contradiction to the civic ideal of equality as a form of communal justice. In the long run individualism and hedonism dissolved both the civic bond and the theory of equality itself. The Athens of Socrates and Pericles was the stage on which the great conflict between justice and hedonism was played out and that drama has given us some of the greatest theoretical discussions of equality in the history of Western thought.

<sup>1</sup>Homer, *The Iliad*, translated by E. V. Rieu (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1950). <sup>2</sup>M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, revised ed. (New York: The Viking Press, 1978), pp. 74-107. <sup>3</sup>Werner Jaeger, *Paideia. The Ideals of Greek Culture*, Vol. I, "Archaic Greece. The Mind of Athens, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1945), p. 5. <sup>4</sup>Werner Jaeger, *Paideia*, Vol. I, p. 21. <sup>5</sup>Hesiod, *The Works and Days*, *Theogony* and *The Shield of Herakles*, translated by Richmond Lattimore (Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan Press, 1959), p. 39. <sup>6</sup>W. G. Forrest, *The Emergence of Greek Democracy, 800-400 B.C.* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 55-58. <sup>7</sup>Hesiod, *Works and Days*, translated by Richmond Lattimore, p. 23. <sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 49-50. <sup>9</sup>M. M. Austin and P. Vidal Na-

quet, *Economic and Social History of Ancient Greece: An Introduction*, translated and revised by M. M. Austin (Berkeley, U. of California Press, 1977). <sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 56-58. <sup>11</sup>Aristotle, *The Politics*, translated by Benjamin Jowett (New York: The Modern Library, 1943), pp. 196-197. <sup>12</sup>I find the reconstruction of Spartan history made by L. F. Fitzhardinge, *The Spartans* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1980), ingenious but overwrought. In spite of its uncertainties I prefer the traditional view. <sup>13</sup>Werner Jaeger, *Paideia*, Vol. I, p. 103. <sup>14</sup>A. Andrews, *The Greek Tyrants* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963). <sup>15</sup>Ernest Barker, *Greek Political Theory, Plato and his Predecessors* (London: Methuen & Co., 1960), p. 50. <sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 50. <sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 54.