Chapter 11

The Pandemic of Tyranny:
The Virus of Hatred and Other Dangers Faced by Democracy During a Pandemic – The Thirty Tyrants of Athens and the Prevention of Tyranny by Civic Humanism

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ABSTRACT

This chapter deals with some of the dangers of the "pandemic" of tyranny that can be made worse during a time of a medical pandemic. In any event, it can result in an attempt to subvert a democratic regime towards more conservative and reactionary political forms. The author studies the case of the Thirty Tyrants of Athens (a result of Athens´s defeat by Sparta in the Peloponnesian War and after the death of Pericles during the pandemic that decimated Athens when it was sieged by Sparta) who substituted democracy with an oligarchy. A fierce repression ensued in which Socrates died, a symbol of the free thought of democratic Athens. The author analyzes the effects of tyranny on people and the Renaissance humanists´ desire to always be vigilant about tyrannical government. He focusses on the civic humanists Francesc Eiximenis (Valencian Kingdom, Crown of Aragon) and Coluccio Salutati (Florence).

INTRODUCTION

Etymologically speaking, "pandemic" ($\pi\alpha\nu\delta\eta\mu\acute{\iota}\alpha$) means something 'that affects the entire people'. COVID-19 is tragically affecting the entire planet and has caused death and side effects to millions of people. It has compromised with lockdowns, curfews, and several restrictions the world economy, both macro and microeconomically. In fact, the courts of law had to intervene to decide whether the application of restrictive measures was just, and they have done so at the request of the opposition political parties that have attempted to use the justice system as an extension of their partisan political fights.[1] It

has threatened the public and private sanitary structures of several countries as well as several models of society. In fact, in western democracies the COVID-19 pandemic has been the context of serious political tensions that have attempted to obtain political benefit in the short term (with the excuse of being preoccupied about people´s health) and have created more general dissension than consensus, provoking controversy instead of unitary action against the COVID-19. This ideal of concern about health as well as a diversity of options when fighting the pandemic (negacionists, defenders or detractors of the face cover, the lockdowns and restrictions, public smoking, seating capacity of outside terraces, etc.) have been used politically in many countries by many political parties of all sorts and whenever there has been election, it has been used to increase the number of extreme conservative options that have advocated solutions that brought those countries closer to negationism than to recognizing the danger of the pandemic. Using the pandemic as banner and defending words such as "freedom" and "business" together with "tradition" and "old values", there has been an increase of the right conservatism that include in their political programs ideas that are more oligarchical than "pandemic" in an etymological sense, that is that do not defend the public interest and the general good.

All this has made us reflect on the apparent fragility of democracy, which is also a "pandemic" political regime based on a culture of paying attention to the general interest and the common good, a topic discussed already in the democratic Athens and the civic humanism of the 14th and 15th centuries. The Athenian democracy of Pericles is the basis of contemporary democracy and the civic humanism of the Renaissance represents the maturity in the theorization on the good government and the measures to prevent tyranny. For this reason, we shall pay attention here to two contemporary civic humanists who were essential for their respective countries, both of which had a paramount urban component: Coluccio Salutati (Florence) and Francesc Eiximenis (Kingdom of Valencia, Crown of Aragon).

It was tyranny that ended Pericles´s Athens. The tyranny of the Thirty Tyrants that despite the economic, social (for its time) and intellectual splendor of Athens (and by extension of the League of Delos, led by Athens), came immediately after this Athenian period. The thirty tyrants received their formation in this cultivated Athens, wealthy, democratic and freethinking, and reacted in a furious manner, as if inoculated with the social virus of hatred, against a democratic system that went against their oligarchical desires and interests. Athens lost the Peloponnesian war against oligarchical Sparta, which exerted its right of war and annihilated its nemesis, Athenian democracy. The Thirty Tyrants collaborated with the enemy, betrayed their homeland and repressed their "demos" with what since then has become a handbook of revolutionary "terror".

THE THRITY TYRANTS OF ATHENS, A PANDEMIC OF TYRANNY THAT SUBVERTED THE ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY ESTABLISHED BY PERICLES

The Thirty Tyrants of Athens (*οἱ Τριάκοντα*) can be considered a paradigmatic case of antidemocratic reaction that willingly attempts to subvert the previous political regime: the democracy established by Lysander, that of Pericles. In fact, with the death of Pericles during the pandemic –a pest—that decimated Athens when it was being besieged by Sparta during the last phase of the Peloponnesian War (431-401 BC) (Cortijo 2019) and the defeat of Athens and the League of Delos led by Athens another "pandemic" developed: the repression of democratic ideas in Athens and of those people that represented them and had distinguished themselves in its service, those who did not bow to the new regime. This one was led by the Thirty Tyrants (under Spartan "protection"), many of whom had been exiled because they

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