



Excerpts from Pericles's Funeral Oration, as recorded by Thucydides in History of the Peloponnesian War, 2:34–2:46

Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighboring states; we are rather a pattern to others than imitators ourselves. Its administration favors the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy. If we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences; if to social standing, advancement in public life falls to reputation for capacity, class considerations not being allowed to interfere with merit; nor again does poverty bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition. The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. There, far from exercising a jealous surveillance over each other, we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbor for doing what he likes, or even to indulge in those injurious looks which cannot fail to be offensive, although they inflict no positive penalty. But all this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless as citizens. Against this fear is our chief safeguard, teaching us to obey the magistrates and the laws, particularly such as regard the protection of the injured, whether they are actually on the statute book, or belong to that code which, although unwritten, yet cannot be broken without acknowledged disgrace.

Excerpts from The Constitution of the Athenians by the "Old Oligarch" (Pseudo-Xenophobe)

And as for the fact that the Athenians have chosen the kind of constitution that they have, I do not think well of their doing that inasmuch as in making their choice they have chosen to let the worst people be better off than the good. Therefore, on this account, I do not think well of their constitution....

There is a point which some find extraordinary, that they everywhere assign more to the worst persons, to the poor, and to the popular types than to the good men: in this very point they will be found manifestly preserving their democracy.... And everywhere on earth the best element is opposed to democracy. For among the best people there is minimal wantonness and injustice but a maximum of ignorance, disorder, and wickedness; for poverty draws them rather to disgraceful actions, and because of a lack of money some men are uneducated and ignorant....