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The Tyranny of the Majority: an Aristotelian View

Although Aristotle did not explicitly use the phrase „majority tyranny,” he came very close to its later formula when he said in his *Politics* that among the different types of democracy, there was one in which the “people” (meaning the poor majority) became a “monarch, one person composed of many,” thereby creating a form of rule that was “the analog of tyranny among the monarchies” (*Politics*, 1292a). This metaphor (the majority as a large person vs. a smaller one called the minority) was later repeated by many works from Thomas Aquinas’ *De regno* to Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*.

It may be asked, however, whether such a notion of a homogeneous majority and the dangers it poses for a likewise homogenous minority is valid anymore. Modern societies, after all, are composed of multiple minorities; the equation of the multitude with the “poor” is also no longer evident; democratic regimes rarely rely on a simple majoritarian principle; and the rule of law, which Aristotle treated as the exact opposite of the rule of the multitude, is now rather a part and parcel of any “genuine” form of democracy.

At the same time, a brief look at the postmodern political condition is enough to convince anyone that social and political movements in democracies still struggle to become majorities (or at least look like one) and use their force to suppress dissenting – allegedly minority – groups and opinions. The paper analyzes the ongoing relevance of the concept of “majority tyranny,” its putative transformations, and a possible Aristotelian response to democratic abuses in contemporary societies and politics.