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Contemporary Democracy and the Mixed-constitution Concept

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Abstract

A “mixed constitution” is a form of government encompassing elements of various political regimes and therefore hardly definable by a single term without radical simplification. Despite its importance in the political thought of classical antiquity, today the concept of the mixed constitution has almost fallen into oblivion as an analytical tool and, with extremely rare exceptions, has survived mainly as a subject of historical studies. According to the classical paradigm, left unmerged, monarchy, aristocracy and democracy are doomed to decline into their vicious versions: tyranny, oligarchy and ochlocracy (mob rule), respectively. This paper explores the present-day relevance of the mixed-constitution concept and assesses the possibilities of reactivating it as a tool for the analysis of contemporary democracies. These contain a series of blatantly non-democratic elements of various types and in various degrees, providing thereby ample material for qualitative and quantitative research. Taken as an empirical tool, the mixed-constitution concept may well apply not only to the analysis of polities, but also other types of organizations, such as municipal government, political parties and commercial companies. The methodology is based on a comparative, idiographic and multidisciplinary approach, combining aspects of history, classical studies, philosophy, sociology and political science. It attempts to transgress the borders of the (conventional) tripartite taxonomy mentioned above and provide new criteria for the classification of regimes, with broader perspectives in mind, referring not only to their political institutions but also to social, economic, mental and cultural aspects.

Keywords: Checks and Balances; Mixed Government; Political Regimes; Tripartite Taxonomy.