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BRIEFLY



Fish Feelings

Former US president George Bush once cryptically remarked that he was sure that “human beings and fish can coexist peacefully”. Fish might beg to differ as millions of them die in scientific laboratories every year. Much of the debate about the use of animals in research focuses on what happens while they are alive: the degree of suffering inflicted on them, how this can be minimised, and the greater benefit it brings to both people and animals. Few talk about the way animals are killed at the end of the research. So, it is important that the regulations scientists follow for animal euthanasia reflect the most humane options available. Animal-welfare researchers have raised concerns about ways in which zebrafish used in laboratories are killed at the end of their useful lives. Studies suggest that an approved anaesthetic used in fish euthanasia causes the creatures distress. The widespread use of carbon dioxide in rodent euthanasia has come under particular scrutiny, because of the pain it causes to rats and mice. Their existence may not always be peaceful, but we can, at least, try and make their end peaceful.

— nature.com



Chicken & Egg

It has been the ultimate philosophical and scientific mystery for centuries — until now, that is. Scientists have claimed to have cracked the riddle of whether the chicken or the egg came first. The answer, they say, is the chicken. Researchers found that the formation of egg shells relies on a protein found only in a chicken's ovaries. Scientists have discovered that eggs can only have been laid by chickens, thus solving the puzzle. Therefore, an egg can exist only if it has been inside a chicken. The protein — called ovocledidin-17, or OC-17 — acts as a catalyst to speed up the development of the shell. This hard shell is essential to house the yolk and its protective fluids while the chick develops inside. Scientists from Sheffield and Warwick universities used a super computer to “zoom in” on the formation of an egg. The computer, called HECToR and based in Edinburgh, revealed that OC-17 is crucial in kick-starting crystallisation — the early stages of the creation of a shell. The protein covers calcium carbonate into calcite crystals that make up the shell.

— dailymail.co.uk

Find out with VIJAY TANKHA what was heady and exciting about democracy in Athens at the time of its origin, as opposed to what it is today

Birth Of DEMOCRACY

As we enter into election mode and it's time to exercise our democratic rights, it would be good to revisit the origins of democracy 2,500 years ago in ancient Greece. When and why did democracy originate? This question is best answered by its own hagiography.

The Athenians, keen to appropriate the honour of giving birth to democracy, locate it not only in their own city but in all the melodrama, of love interrupted! Though facts didn't quite add up as they were meant to, the story is more dramatic than the slow reforms introduced into the political system.

For, love is different, as were the lovers — Harmodius and Aristogeiton. Both natural males: how else could the equal respect and ardour that is love become manifest? It wasn't homosexuality — the word hadn't yet been invented — and if it was unnatural, what wasn't? With the assassination of Hipparchus, they became famous for overthrowing the Tyranny.

Unfortunately, he was not the tyrant but his brother, and had, like many relatives of the powerful, misbehaved — making improper advances to the young Harmodius. It was a disaster, and the real tyrant, Hippias, was not killed but both lovers were, one on the spot and the other under torture. The tyrant was overthrown later. While the seeds of Athenian democracy were sown (though with Spartan help), the credit was given to the celebrated lovers. Love between men became symbolic of freedom.

Closer to reality, formation of

endurable democracy at Athens was both slow and deliberated with a series of reforms, beginning with the infamous code of Draco (mid seventh century BCE). Draco's contribution to Athenian democracy was introducing written law and a council of citizens chosen by lot. Most of Draco's initiatives were discarded by Solon, poet and legislator who later Athenians regarded as the real founder of their democratic conventions.

Solon did recast the city's political configuration, introducing greater balance in the distribution of power, and forever altering the laws of debt, whereby those unable to meet their creditors would be enslaved.

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Nevertheless, Solon's reforms maintained an uneasy compromise between rich and poor. Membership to most regulatory bodies was still determined by wealth (though the Assembly had to approve all decrees). With the overthrow of the tyranny, subsequent political re-



forms undertaken around 500 BCE placed *kratos* or power in the hands of demos or the people.

These reforms were built upon Solon's initiatives. Cleisthenes reorganised the city's civic and geographical structure, integrating the town, coastal area and hinterland: each of the 10 new demes or demographic tribes whose representatives were chosen for civic posts, included these three distinct areas. The aim was to foster unity and reduce faction. Greek democracy was premised not on some abstract notion of equality, but on the practical premise of equality before the law (*isonomia*).

Dull isn't it? The anecdotal origin of democracy as the overthrow of a tyranny, as a tragic true-love story is so much more engaging than Aristotle's incomplete study of ancient constitutional history. Even Draco has his memorable moment when, honoured by the



Aeginetans in the theatre, they threw so many hats and shirts and cloaks on his head that he suffocated (Plutarch).

The irrelevant and the irreverent catch the imagination, overpowering truth. Of Solon, too, it is said, that in order to avoid being made tyrant by popular sentiment, he left the city, returning only to see how his laws were holding up. Cleisthenes' family was accursed: his ancestors had violated the laws of sanctuary, and he spent his active life an exile.

What was heady and exciting about democracy in Athens? It valued complete freedom of speech. So much so that the loudest voices of that time, still heard today, were of those who pillo-

ried the low intellectual calibre of the demos and its representatives! These critics included the most revered names in western thought: philosophers, playwrights and poets. The 'great unwashed' ruled the roost, much to the chagrin of thinking aristocrats.

Despite them and a long and losing series of battles with Sparta, Athenian democracy flourished. Its workings such as are known to us, make for an interesting contrast with procedures followed today. The usual contrast between direct and representative, fails to capture the real participatory nature of civic life in the city state. Not least was how they referred to themselves.

In Thucydides' history, the main contestants were not Sparta and Athens, but Spartans and Athenians. The difference is crucial. There was no entity such as Athens, but rather a collective of citizens, the Athenians, who did this, sailed there, fought bravely, etc. Civic duties were the responsibility of citizens, not of an abstract state.

Personality Cult

But for all this, the city, as Plato noted, remained deeply divided — not merely by its political factions, but by the gulf between rich and poor. Citizens of Athens were outnumbered three to one by non-citizens, both freemen, and slaves. The small voting populace was a fickle body, easily swayed by demagogues, who played to its fears and aspirations. Buying the citizen body with freebees was common.

Democracies, according to Plato, were breeding grounds for tyrannies; tyrants often came to power on a popular mandate — Pericles for instance, or Peisistratus, who once rode into the city on a chariot with an actor dressed as the goddess Athena.

The greatest enemy of democracy was really the cult of personality: a single charismatic leader who promised quick solutions. In any case, Athenian democracy came to an abrupt end; the shadow of Macedon loomed over it. While during his short life Alexander did not interfere with its internal workings, after his death the Athenians struggled in vain to regain their freedoms. ■

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Follow Your Impulse

When followed earnestly, this natural signal is guaranteed to help you succeed in life, says MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

Everyone is born with a perfect nature. Nature is the best guide of every man and woman. One's nature gives the right direction on all occasions. This natural signal, when followed diligently, is a guarantee of human success.

Stomach This

For example, overeating is a common problem. It leads to obesity and all kinds of diseases. Yet, it is very simple to avoid overeating. A few minutes before reaching the stage of overeating, the stomach gives out a light signal. If you listen to that signal and stop eating there and then, you can prevent yourself from eating too much. This is the easiest way to save yourself from all kinds of unnatural diseases. When you make an incorrect statement or talk about a matter that is not right, your conscience gives you a signal from within. And if you hear that signal, you can certainly avoid wrong thinking and wrong speech. There is no doubt that wrong thinking and speaking are the root causes of failure.

Suppose, while engaging in some activity, it appears after some time that you are not getting the expected results and that your step is proving to be counterproductive, then this kind of negative result is a signal. If you listen to this signal, ob-



jectively reassess your activities and redraft your plan of action, then such self-correction will certainly lead to success.

Then, there is a very important signal which teaches you by way of advice. Other people are like mirrors. You can fail to see the marks on your face, but a mirror doesn't fail to reflect them. The advice given by other people is just like the mirror's reflection. That is, others' objective advice is also a signal. Sincerely heed this signal and try to understand others' point of view. You will then readily reach the right conclusion. This will help you to correct your course of action and will finally help you to reach your goal.

In the rainy season, you go out without an umbrella, and midway it starts raining. In this case, the rain is also a signal. It reminds you that you failed to take the precautionary measure of taking an umbrella. This is an example from nature.

So is the case of human life. In human life, everyone always receives some signals, sometimes internally, and sometimes externally. The best way to ensure your success is simple: Listen to that signal, obey it and you will certainly reach your goal.



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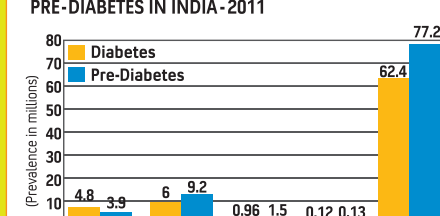
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