Examine the views of Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, John Calhoun, and John Dewey, on democracy. What are the strengths and weaknesses each theorist’s views on this subject, in your opinion?

Various theorists shared different views on democracy, some of whom are Aristotle, Tomas Hobbes, John Locke, John Calhoun and John Dewey. All of these theorists contributed their views on democracy. However, none of their contribution is completely perfect about democracy as it is today. This leads to the discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each theorist’s views on democracy. In addition, to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of these theorists effectively, one should have a clear understanding of the meaning of the term democracy. Democracy has no unique definition; it has been defined by many schools of thought. Nevertheless, two most well-known schools of thought will be discussed, which are the process democrats and the principle democrats.

The first school of thought simply defined democracy as a way of making decision. They believed that democracy is nothing more than an agreement among citizens that the majority vote will carry the issue or that one branch of government will not reach too far into the functions of another branch.¹ And the second school of thought defined as a system that every individual is basically equal to all other individual, and that each has certain inalienable

¹ Leon P. Baradat, Political Ideologies, Their Origins and Impacts (Printed in the USA, 1988) 48
Such inalienable rights are stated in the Declaration of Independence of the United State of America. Among these are the right to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. Now it is time to apply the views of Aristotle, Tomas Hobbes, John Locke, John Calhoun, and John Dewey to see what things they shared in commons and differences and the weaknesses of each theorist.

Like Plato, Aristotle had pessimistic view on democracy. In ancient Greek, there were very good few quality people and since democracy allows the many to rule, the uneducated and the poor, it will result in the tyranny of majority. In another word, to Aristotle, democracy means ochlocracy, meaning the mob rule. One of the characteristics that Aristotle shared his view on democracy is the many rule despite he dislikes it. The strength of Aristotle was that he recognized democracy as a good form of government only if the many rule for the good of all. However, still he preferred oligarchy as the best possible form of government. Aristotle did not think of another kind of democracy, which is the representative democracy. Under system, it is about similar to oligarchy, because a number of elitist representatives can represent on behalf of the needs and wills of the people in the whole society.

The only Hobbes’ view on democracy was that the government is derived from the people, which is one of the most important characteristics of today’s democracy. Hobbes propounded this theory as follows: government is an artificial creature brought about by the voluntary association of the governed. When questioned who should be the ruler, Hobbes proposed the creation of a sovereign authority power that would exercise unquestioned authority. This point strongly showed the weakness of Hobbes that he is too much trust on the absolute monarch, which is easily leading to dictatorship

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2 Leon P, 48
3 All About America, a mini-history (Printed in the USA, published by Griffith Publishing Group, Inc.)
4 Leon P, 50
5 Leon P, 50
6 http://www.blupete.com/Literature/Biographies/Philosophy/Hobbes.htm (No page designation)
due to the lack of the separation of power. His strength was that though he was very pessimistic about the state of nature, he realized that people are smart enough to give up their rights and powers to the absolute monarch to govern themselves to provide peace and security among the people within the society.

John Locke can be said as the most influential theorist on democracy. Like Hobbes, he believed that the government is established by the people. While Hobbes wanted absolute power of the ruler, John Locke preferred limited. The specific functions of the government are to provide external security, international tranquility and the protection of the social contract. Another John Locke’s view on democracy was representative democracy. Though Locke believe in majority rule, he though that it best that they not rule themselves directly. He saw members of Parliament as representing their constituents, and he believed that they should vote as their constituents wanted. He also believed in the separation of power between the executive and the legislature. The legislature should decide on the policy of the government, and the executive should dutifully carry out the mandates of parliament. A decade later, Locke’s notion of separation of powers has been incorporated into the United States Constitution. But American political formulation complemented the formular by adding the judiciary as a coequal branch of government to fully ensure that no political dictatorship would become practical or likely. In addition, he contributed to all people, regardless of differences in intelligent, wealth, physical prowess and so on, had the same natural rights. He felt that people would behave decently when left alone and hence argued that they should be free to exercise their rights without hindrance or regulation as long as they did not interfere with the rights of others. Hence to Locke, freedom was found in the absence of

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8 Leon P, 60
9 Leon P, 60
10 Leon P, 60
11 Martin, 36
12 Martin, 38
13 Leon P, 56
Unlike Hobbes, if the ruler becomes corrupted and cruel, Locke argued people have the right to put him out of his office. It could be through revolution or election. His views on democracy such as the representative democracy, the separation of power, individual liberty and freedom are the strengths of his view on democracy, while the absent of the judiciary in the separation of power is probably the only one that shows his weakness view on this subject.

John Calhoun view’s on democracy was always the ways of limiting the government power. Government must be limited, and the mechanism by which a government is limited is what Calhoun called a constitution. Another way of limiting the power of the government is the voting. The vote was necessary, he thought, because it gave the people control over the length of time the ruler could rule. Thus, by exercising the voting power of the people, they can get the oppressive ruler out of power. Perhaps the important theory of Calhoun is the concurrent majority. He preferred many majorities rather than one single majority, because he believed that no one majority could represent the several interests of each people. For example, if one majority concerns only economic, only people who face with economic issue would be happy in this field, but it does not mean that these people and the other are satisfied with this majority group. Why is it like this? Because people have many, different interests and each individual is differ from another. As a result, the concurrent majority is very important to fulfill variety of people’s interests. His strength view on democracy was that Calhoun advocated a system of pluralism democracy, which allows many interests groups to fulfill the needs of their group members. The idea of concurrent majorities with different majority interest groups (along with economic, cultural, environmental, fundamental religious or regional) also gave negative impact, in that it will therefore create many political cultures divided in terms of ideologies, which cause the whole society being unstable.
John Dewey was an American theorist of social democracy. Unlike conservatives who believe in the status quo, he advocated political institutions change for the good of society. People, Dewey asserted, should study their society and not hesitate to make institutional changes that would improve their lives.\textsuperscript{16} Put in different word, if there is anything that people are dissatisfied with the existing system, change shall be made to increase the happiness of society, but not fundamental and extreme change like the radical and the reactionary. His strength was that although John Dewey proposed change, he did not want extreme change, which leads to the disruption and destruction of the whole society. Optimism about people’s ability to solve their problem is probably the weakness of John Dewey. It is hard for people to realize that something is incorrect in the status quo and seek for change.

Though Aristotle was pessimistic about democracy, he also shared his view on this subject just like Tomas Hobbes, John Locke, John Calhoun and, John Dewey did. No single theorist among them had all strengths or weaknesses view on democracy, but if combining their view together, a true, modern democracy will be seen as it is practiced today.

\textsuperscript{16} Leon P, 92
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