DEMOCRACY FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY:

FROM DOMINATION TO CO-CREATION

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Introduction

Democracy is now one of the most common terms used in public rhetoric; however, it seldom serves as an object of philosophical reflection. Indeed, democracy could sometimes appear as a 'worn out', devaluated notion, deprived of any clear sense. In post-communist countries, the use of the term 'democracy' equals the usage of the word 'communism' several decades ago. The term is widely used in official discourse, but no one takes it seriously. The fact that many of today's born 'democrats' in the Ukraine and other ex-Soviet countries are former communists only strengthens the idea that 'democracy' could be perceived as a keyword denoting the belonging of its conveyor to the self-proclaimed 'power party'. As Ukrainian sociologist Iryna Popova explains:

> Parading the 'democracy' of our society, constant usage of the term 'democracy' in the situation of lawlessness and actual violation of people's rights, considerable spreading of poorness and poverty is a

blasphemy, because it leads to devaluation of that word, to the commonplace perception of democracy as a situation where 'everything goes', and 'a plain man' has no protection against that. In other words, against the background of our practices that term obtains the sense directly opposite to what a researcher means by it.[1]

Nevertheless, we still believe that phenomenon of democracy should not be reduced to its real/political connotation, providing the space for its philosophical comprehension and its true realization. Democracy from the philosophical perspective is not just a certain empirically given way of organizing the political system of the state and the society (featuring general elections, parliament, freedom of speech, etc.); it is rather a certain ideal image of harmonious social life, that more or less, corresponds to historical forms of its embodiment in real/political life.

Our position is close to the tradition of participatory democracy. In particular, its American champion, Benjamin Barber, argues that there are two types of democracy present in today's society – official democracy with its 'big politics', party intrigues, corruption, and bureaucracy, and real 'neighborhood democracy' with its practice of local self-government and grassroots voluntary activities. That is why, according to Barber, we have to expand our understanding of what is actually democratic, rather than expanding 'democracy' itself.[2] However, we think that, at times, he philosophical approach to democracy is aimed at limiting that understanding rather than expanding it – for every philosophical definition sets strict limitations to a term in order to differentiate the entity it designates from things unfit for the notion in question. In other words, democracy is to be distinguished from other phenomena that exist in our society and title themselves as democracy while being indeed something very different.

So, how should philosophy understand the term 'democracy'? The most simple and usual understanding of democracy is 'power of the people', or the people's sovereignty, i.e., in which the people are the source, bearers, and conductors of power. Such a formulation presented an adequate guideline and served as a roadmap for social/political structure during the age of absolutism, for then the usual reality was the dominance of a sole monarch, or a narrow circle of persons, possessing power by the right of birth. Then the ideal of the power for all the people – and not one single person or single exclusive estate – was progressive and revolutionary.

But today such an approach to understanding and defining democracy turns out to be very abstract, i.e., not clear enough in order to serve as a lodestar in the semidarkness of the political life of our society, which already calls itself 'democratic'. As Barber states: "The history of democracy itself is contained in the history of the word democracy."[3] In our opinion, that history is a concretization of the notions 'people' (δήμος) and 'power' (κράτος), which constitute the democracy phenomenon. Such a concretization could still be presented as development (not only expansion) of the meaning of the notions in question. In ancient times, the democracy of the *poleis* was based on the labor of masses of slaves, deprived of any rights, even of the right to be considered as human beings. The δήμος (i.e., *demos,* or the people who can be and are subjects of democracy) differed from λαός, (i.e., *laos*, or all the people/population in general, regardless of their social state, their ability or inability to be subjects of power. In other words, the 'people' were certainly not the *demos* that we often refer to when we talk about true democracy in the contemporary meaning of the word. Medieval European cities, which also featured some form of democracy, supplied obstacles of similar kind as

well. Until the end of the 18th century, strict qualifications based on property or social status prevented many people from participating in political life, let alone providing for their ability to serve as subjects of power.

However, it must be noted that even after the revolutions of 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, humanity has not really achieved true democracy, in which people can participate fully in policy making. The principal mistake of the un-philosophical, or political and PR, approach is its failure to understand the process of evolution towards the most optimal form of society and government, the process of concretization of notions 'people' and 'power' (which democracy is, in our opinion, when considered from philosophical position), vs. an abstract given state of affairs that could be transferred to any place and any time but is in fact just one of many inflexible historical forms of the becoming of democracy as a process. No one of such stages could be evaluated as 'full democracy', but each one serves as a certain approximation on the way to the ideal.

After such a general methodological digression, let us turn back to considering the development and expansion of the notion of 'people' – the number of human beings who could be and are subjects of social/political power. Gradually, in the course of time, the slaves, the serfs, the workers, the poor, women, national/ethnic minorities, and other groups and strata are tending to be included into the notion of *demos*, into the volume of people formally subject to be bearers and conductors of power. Thus, 'national democracy' discovers that different ethnic groups have equal rights for participation in the life of society. Similarly, social democracy defends the rights of the poor, and stands for equality of all human beings irrelevant to their social and economical positions.

The variety of such stages of democracy as a process explains also the emergence of the notion 'people's democracy' that seems to be tautology at a first glance but clearly reflects the spontaneous urge to augment, to concretize, to expand the understanding of 'the people' over the limits of just classical *demos*: in the first case 'the people' means ethnos, in the other case 'the people' means social masses that oppose the elite, etc.

Besides, those named forms of democracy, or, it would be better to say, those stages of the democratization process, remaining actual under present-day situations, are still abstract in relation to further possible concretization of what democracy really is. Thus, the idea of national democracy faces irreversible impact of globalization processes. The problem is also that under formal empowerment of a greater and greater number of people with the right to be bearers and conductors of power; the keyword here is 'formal'. It is of no use to go into length while proving that proclamation of the power of the people, let with the most progressive and expanded meaning of the latter notion, in no way is the real ability of each person to act as the subject of the life of his/her society.

But before turning to the substantial aspect of philosophical understanding of democracy, let us first review the very notion of power that is itself found to be no less complex and subject to development as the term 'people'. In Greek, as well as in other languages, there are different nuances of the word 'power'. First, it is the initial term κράτος, power as wraparound dominance and possession, peculiar to the past historical forms of total supremacy. Second, it is a more gentile άρχος – power as guidance, management, rule, and administration. Regardless of the fact that the two terms, used since Aristotle's time, as synonyms (say, both monarchy and aristocracy were described by the philosopher as 'right' forms of government, while oligarchy and democracy being

declared to be 'wrong'), their etymological distinction is not casuistic or idle philological whimsy. French poet and journalist, Charles Péguy, one of the few thinkers who stated the substantial difference of the two types of power, a hundred years ago, used the distinction to construct a whole conception: power as dominance is the power over somebody, while power-governance is the power to do something.[4]

However, there is the third notion of power that is not mentioned by Péguy, – it is εξουσία – power-ability, which is more than power-governance entitled to be denoted as power to act/create something. By the way, it is this word that is being used to designate the notion of power in the Greek text of the New Testament, in the well-known words of the Apostle Paul, "For there is no power but of God" (Romans 13:1). This expression, especially in the 20th century, aroused much bewilderment by interpreters: does all power come from God according to the Christian teaching, even that of Hitler or Stalin? Such bewilderment is indeed a philologically and philosophically example of unjustified mixture of different meanings of 'power': it is εξουσία being used in the original by the Apostle, and neither *kratos* nor *archos*, which are not to be equaled to *eksousia* – the ability to do/create is beyond all doubts given by God, and that is what the epistle in question states.

It could seem that our attempt to define the democratic power as the process of human and society development by differentiating the three denoted types of power[5] is unnecessary 'proliferation of essences' and could lead but to more confusion. However, we think that such a distinction is what can provide for more accurate and true study of all the features of democratization process, i.e., power as dominance, power as administration, and power as ability not only help to follow the history of the becoming

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of power phenomenon (and that of our understanding of this complex social entity), but to ground philosophy of democracy as the activity on forming values and goals of human social development as well.

Following the distinction of notions we propose, democracy is literally not 'people's power', but rather 'people's supremacy'. However, as we already noted, it historically became a custom that such usual Greek terms as, for instance, 'autocracy' and 'monarchy', are practically identical. Basing on our point of view, that is not always the case. Under formal supremacy of the people (in all the denoted historical variety of the latter as well) the real governance often turns to be a monopolized property of one person or several social elite groups. In this sense one can speak of the existence of, so to say, 'democracy-monarchy' or 'democracy-oligarchy'. In the first case, the formal supremacy of the people is realized under 'the guidance' of one single person (an excellent example of such 'democratic monarchy' is truly the Soviet Union under Stalin); the second case represents an elite-based form of social and state government organization (i.e., the much more frequent phenomenon).

It could be also mentioned that 'tyranny' (one more Aristotle's term for the sole form of government) designates evaluation (a negative one, emphasized by Aristotle) of any form of power organization, rather than that specific form of either *kratos* or *archos*, – and evaluation not only of monarchy or autocracy, but of oligarchy as well (as in the 'thirty tyrants' of Athens). This very 'axiological' series of notions should also include the notion of aristocracy – 'power of the best', as designating rather qualitative and substantial than quantitative and formal aspect of a real way of social/political organization. 'The power of the best' does not necessary equal oligarchy, 'the power of

the few', which is opposed to aristocracy by Aristotle as negative to positive, but, in our opinion, rather opposes aristocracy as qualitative description of power against quantitative one. Aristocracy-monarchy (the power of one 'best' person), as well as aristocracy-oligarchy are quite frequent in history, thus it is clearly possible to talk about aristocracy as augmenting the quantitative notion of formal democracy.

Moreover, one could say that such a qualitative side of power definition reveals itself in the third aspect of its notion, besides power-*kratos* and power-*archos*, and namely as power-*eksousia*, power as ability to act/create. It is in this sense that we can talk particularly about noocracy – the latter is easily noted to serve not as a replacement for democracy or aristocracy, i.e., not as negation of the power of all the people without any exception to be subjects of policy-making, but as their supplement describing the concrete quality that actually determines the belonging of the real creative power to this or that person, which is indeed a concretization of wisdom as a criterion for choosing somebody for a ruling position.

Such a situation should not be considered as something ideal and unrealizable, or the one that belongs solely to the realm of futurology. There were several attempts to realize a noocracy in humankind history. For example, soviet 'nomenclature' represented (in theory, at least) a glaring example of democratic aristocracy-noocracy when a person pretending to hold a high position in the social/political hierarchy grounds his/her claims and, first of all, his/her level of relevant competence by taking an exam in Marxist-Leninist philosophy. The situation of such competence tests degenerating into empty formality and giving birth to corruption is not a feature of USSR only. As the *kējŭ* examination system that was the only way to participate in social/state government

existed in China since Sui times for 13 centuries, while developing itself and still being an active ground for corruption. The other thing is that since ancient times the tests implied not only memorizing and citing works of classical literature and philosophy (as retranslating dogmatized ideas of Hegel, Marx, Lenin, or Mao), but creative elements as well – particularly composing poetry. It is significant that the notion of aristocracy (in its universal form, relevant to medieval China as well, which quite differed from feudal Europe) meant general humanitarian education: a competent ruler was considered to come out of good poet, rather than of skilled agronomist, keen-witted merchant, or even brave warrior. As a result there was a phantasmagoric situation being formed: already in the middle of the 19th century, ministers quite seriously explained to the Chinese emperor that while considering reports by officials, it is not the contents of messages that should be taken into account, but grammatical correctness of language and qualities of literature style. It is not surprising than that the Chinese Empire was regularly challenged by turbulent decline periods, in spite of all the endeavors to constitute a system of government based on centuries-old Confucian traditions of power of the best and the wisest people.

We think that the major shortcoming of such an approach lies in the mentioned unjustified mixture of different notions of power. In other words, postulating aristocracy and noocracy not as supplements, but as oppositions of democracy is doomed from its very beginning. However such an aspiration, which is not infrequent today, certainly deserves understanding and explanation. Since Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre, up until Nikolai Berdyaev and Pavel Florenskiy – a great number of prominent thinkers had lamented that in the course of democratization, as new and new senses and population

strata were tended to be included into *demos* entitled with power, – the quantitative side started to dominate over the qualitative one. Instead of considering a question on the base of its correspondence to the truth, there was a simple voting conducted, and its being approved or rejected by the majority of voices – while the opinion of the majority is in no way the most correct, wise, and optimal, – as many respected authors have stated. As a result, in the 20th century we see certain aristocratization of thought alongside formal democratization of life.

We dare to say that while such an opinion has indeed some rational point, the general question regarding the democracy problem is still put up in a wrong way: the substantial part, as we already noted, i.e., the concretization of the notion of power must necessarily follow the formal expansion of the notion of people. Events of the 20th century provide evidence in support of Vilfredo Pareto's observation that history is a cemetery of aristocracies. And while sharing in many senses the criticism of formal democracy by aristocratically and noocratically minded thinkers, resolving that contradiction is possible only in the direction of further democratization.

That direction could be designated by Barber's apt turn of phrase: 'an aristocracy of everyone.'[6] In the preceding historical times the development of one person, or that of a narrow circle of persons, was possible due to the slave labor and ignorance of peasants and artisans, who were considered by 'noble and educated' circles first as common and people and later as depersonalized masses, while opposing them to the intelligent human personality. However 'the revolt of the masses' of our days had its goal not in the death of personality, but quite the opposite, the death of historical blind 'mass', its own

transformation into community of personalities – what is required here, is the right philosophical indication of the development direction.

Titanic, strong-willed, heroic personalities – whether unfortunately or luckily – are no more in our age; the climate is not favorable for them. However still in the beginning of 1930s, the already mentioned Pavel Florenskiy, a man of great universal mind, used to set his expectations for 'the organization of the future state' on the coming of one strong-willed personality able to put an end to disorder and confusion of irrational 'democracy'.[7] One could also remember more recent events, like 'the orange' *coup d'état* in Ukraine in 2004: all the hopes of millions of people – nearly the half of nation's population – were linked to one single political personality who used to state with confidence and authority: "I know. I believe…" In 2005, Viktor Yushchenko became the first Ukrainian ever featured in the 'Time 100: The World's Most Influential People' list – not only those of Ukraine or of former USSR. But what really could that very person do in his five years of holding the position of not the last man in not the poorest state, while having the credit of trust unseen before both inside the country and outside it, from the Western public opinion? By 2010, the same Viktor Yushchenko is unsure to be enlisted amongst the hundred of most influential and respected people even in Ukraine alone.

The problem is not so much in the personality of Yushchenko, who was completely and coincidentally uplifted into the rank of presupposed 'Messiah' and who certainly did not have his goal in evident sabotage or in losing trust and respect, – as in the changed cultural and historical situation that no longer allows to separate the power/ability away from the power/management, all the more, to disguise their lack under the claims for power-supremacy. What heroes and statesmen of the past were

credited for (up to the sacrificing millions of people for constituting a unitary state or a just society), is now being condemned, both by law and by morality.

That means that the denoted development direction implies the change of the democracy's subject and scale. Until today the major actor of democratic power, the main space for democracy's outer development and expansion has been the state – more precisely, 'nation-state' of the modern age, which under globalization represents a rather archaic institute on the historical arena, not coping with its tasks and trying to disguise its helplessness and even uselessness. Identification of democracy with structures related to state organization, – like the electoral system, division of power, and parliamentarianism, – i.e., with the so-called 'Westminster democracy', peculiar to some investigators, contradicts both traditions of classical understanding of democracy as the power of all the people, and the already present real trends of democratization. Democracy is not simply the division of power, neither is it a many-party system or elections of representatives, – democracy is the means for optimizing social life so that it better suits the interests of each person. Democracy is the supremacy of the interest of each human person.

In our time, under globalization humanity faces the new form, new space of democracy development – the third one, after its antique and medieval *poleis* form, and its nation-state modern form, – the space encompassing the humanity as a whole. There is a criticism about nation-state, postulating its irrelevance and uselessness in our times, appearing both from the left and from the right. We can just mention two books with the identical title – "The end of the nation state" – published in 1995. According to Japanese business-consultant Kenichi Ohmae, such a state lacks any meaning for global economy, it hamper the development of the economy with its barriers and borders[8]. And French

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diplomat, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, who stands for more humanistic positions, thinks that nation-state is still too remote from the daily life in order to be able to satisfy the needs of concrete persons, and appears increasingly like 'a straitjacket' relating not only to economical globalization of the world, but sovereignty, defense, and social justice. [9]

We believe that the development of democracy under globalization does not lie in the disappearance of nation-states, i.e., the losing their exclusive status as the arena and the embodiment of political and social human life, but in the development of the power/ability to act, as opposed to power to dominance, and being decentralized and spread in all multitudes of spheres of human life and activity, from family, workplace, and neighborhood, and up to the humankind in general.

It is only such a concrete approach to considering the phenomenon of democracy, which enables realization and noocratic conception of people's power, of the power of the best on the basis of wisdom, thus embodying the classical ideal of social organization in which, according to Kant's expression, each person has the courage to use his/her own mind. In this case – using one's own mind for governing oneself and one's life, and not trying to alienate that burden and that responsibility in favor of someone else, whether voluntary or compulsory.

That is the point where 'noocracy' opposes formally understood 'aristocracy' as the power of the few realized both in medieval nobility power and in modern representative systems. In this narrow, but philosophically sound sense, from the point of view of substantial (participatory) democracy, – there is no fundamental difference between feudal social order and contemporary system called indirect, representative democracy. Numerous 'elite theories' or 'vanguard theories' insist upon the inability of

broad masses to manage the state, – it does not matter whether that inability is permanent or provisional – it is being compensated by electing representatives.

The problem, however, is that the ability to use one's own mind is required for electing such representatives no less then it is needed for direct realization of social self-governance under the situation of conceptual 'complete democracy'. Trying to approach the question of electing adequate 'aristocratic' representatives to state bodies, we can sum the presuppositions for rationality of such elections as following – a person that has no possibility to conduct his/her power over social governance directly, comprehends and accepts: (a) his/her democratic right to be the subject of power; (b) his/her inability to actually realize that power due to subjective (not objective) reasons, i.e., due to the lack of time, personal qualities, or education; (c) his/her interests in the sphere of governance that could be delegated to other person; (d) that person's suitability for governing the society in accordance with the elector's interests. It could be easily concluded then that the requirements for a rational democratic elector are even more utopian then postulating the ability of each person, by Lenin's expression, to carry one's share of the burden on state governance.

In other words, representative democracy has nothing to do with noocracy, with the rational conception of democracy [10] – the latter can embody itself only in the next historical form of the development of the 'democracy' process. The humankind has already approached such a stage of its development when democracy becomes a real possibility for the greatest number of people to manage oneself and to build one's own life according to one's abilities and understanding, by one's conscience and under one's responsibility. Such self-governance should not be feared to accept features of solipsism;

– the very social nature of humans contradicts that supposition. The higher cultural level a person has reached, the more effective his/her 'power over oneself' is and the more good could he or she do for the society and a community. Only such human personality could serve as the unit of measuring democracy, as its ultimate goal.

Thus, we can summarize that today's democratization processes of the globalized world are indeed correlative to philosophical musings on democracy as the process of approaching the optimal social and political organization. Democracy process as formal extension of *demos* notion entitling all the people with no exception with the right to be subjects of power must be followed by concretization of the notion of power, providing for the realization of that right in practice, developing from dominance – through government and management – to the competent activity, co-creativity of all the people. Aristocracy while being related to the power in its first narrow sense could be realized as oligocracy only, as the supremacy of minority, which in no way today could be the minority of 'the best'. As for democracy, it embodies itself as panarchy (substantive, and not only formal, power of all the people), and further as *paneksousia* (as development of everybody's abilities, total higher education, all-round human development up to personality level). Only then can it enable noocracy as wise democracy and as power – not of 'the best' people of any strata, class or social group never eluding its degeneration, but as the power of the best in each person, – not limited by the state power level, but originating with the power over oneself, one's direct community at home and at workplace, and going up to the possibility of influencing the future all of humankind.

Notes:

[1] Popova I. M. Publicity of Sociology. – In: Sociology: Theory, Methods, Marketing. – Kiev, 2008. – Iss. 2. – P. 19–20 (In Ukrainian).

[2] Barber B. Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age. – London; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984. – P. XIV.

[3] Ibid. – P. 195.

[4] Péguy Ch. Œuvres en prose complètes. – Paris: Gallimard, 1987. – T. 1. – P. 1803.

[5] See: Tolstoukhov A. V., Parapan I. G., Mielkov Iu. A. Democracy: Power, People, Nation. – In: Practical Philosophy. – Kiev, 2008. – Iss. 4. – Pp. 69–81 (In Russian).

[6] Barber B. J. An Aristocracy of Everyone: The Politics of Education and the Future of America. – Oxford; N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1994. – 320 p.

[7] See: Florenskiy P. A. The Supposed State Organization in the Future. – Moscow: Gorodetz Publ, House, 2009. – P. 11. [In Russian].

[8] Ohmae K. The End of the Nation State: The Rise of Regional Economies. – New York: Free Press, 1995. – P. 5

[9] Guéhenno J.-M. The End of the Nation-State. – Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995. – P. 12–13.

[10] See: Mielkov Iu. A. Democracy and Rationality // Practical Philosophy. – Kiev, 2007. – Iss. 3. – Pp. 98–109. (In Ukrainian)