



Demosophia

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Democracy and philosophy are only two sides of the answer to the same perplexity: that of a human gathering that no longer has a sacred (or natural, but in fact the two merge) bond to join together. It would not be abusive to couple them to form demosophia: the art or science of discerning the people, their nature, their good.

Democracy and philosophy are one and the same thing in that both essentially relate to a lack of foundation. Democracy is the state in which there is a group without a leader and law. Philosophy is the state of thinking devoid of principle and rule.

In both cases it is a question of inventing, and in both cases, there is no question of arriving at a definitive result (which would suppress any deliberation of decisions and any elaboration of meanings). This is the reason why democracy and philosophy appear together in Western history, at the moment when this history is separating from social and symbolic forms shaken by profound transformations. It is an age of loss and of need to invent. It is the Greek, Jewish and Roman age, soon also the age of Islam.

Beyond this history it is always about something else: forms of government and forms of thought draw their resources from deposits of forms and forces that bear fruit from remarkable inventions that always relate to an immemorial fund (myths, wisdoms, symbolic regimes). These are arts of governing and arts of thinking, not the urgent need to trick with precariousness and bewilderment. There are traditional cults or meditations and recitations, as well as kings, priests, shamans. An order is assured, a regularity, a rhythm - under the condition of an unimpeachable hierarchy.

On the contrary, in democracy and philosophy there is a haste, an agitation, an avidity of the destitute people, whereas in empires or tribes there is an assurance, a majesty that traverses even the miseries and tyrannies — without preventing wars or conquests. In the same way, in the West a logic of production and progress is awakening rather than a wisdom of reproduction and conservation. It could be said that the West has been pushed towards growth/progress? (with an organic and innovative model) while elsewhere it has stuck to increase (with a cumulative and transmitting model).

But the agitation conquered the world when it became technological in the sense that implies going beyond the use of the given and forcing the elements. The example and symbol of this is navigation: with the single rudder, known in ancient China but little used and on the other hand developed and perfected in 13th-14th century Europe, ships can much better and faster chart their course across the oceans. The use of gunpowder in firearms has a similar history. In just a few centuries the technological complex, which became industrial, managerial and entrepreneurial, extended its network to the whole planet. Democracy and philosophy, in their intimate connection, have been part of this extension.

One could say that democracy and philosophy form a double technology of forcing the symbolic element. Where there is no sacred or natural principle or order, it is necessary to invent the law itself, that is to say, the functioning of the social assemblage as well as the foundations and/or the finality of this functioning. No democracy without a questioning of the very possibility of law, no philosophy without a practice of discussing principles and ends.



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Plato might seem to contradict this statement, since he is opposed to democracy. But he does so only in the name of what he thinks is the truth of the people gathered in the city. One can even say that Plato confirms the symbiosis of democracy and philosophy as the reality of a single process: that of giving meaning and consistency to the existence that is devoid of it. Existence is common — and it is for this reason that all cultures have always been provided with provisions for the maintenance and prosperity of the community.

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2

Demosophia will have formed the political, legal and speculative aspect of the technological enterprise engaged in the pre-European Mediterranean. The Roman world will have been its first production, followed by Europe.

There is no doubt that the technological extension was also an enterprise of domination. The question today is no longer to reveal the domination, but rather to note that the dominant force has lost the confidence that it attributed to itself and that up to a certain point everyone had recognized this. Technical power has nothing to do with an ability to make sense of existence. This is why today democracy and philosophy, considered as technologies for living together, project a poor image.

However, we only notice this weakness within the so-called developed societies. For others, the whole relative Western well-being (food, health, leisure, domestic comfort, mobility, etc.) constitutes a model and spurs the desire. But precisely, desire is beginning to abandon developed nations. They are becoming aware of the vanity and even emptiness of a

life subjected to an enormous techno-economic machine that only works for a few, which it enriches exponentially, while the others are less and less able to grasp what the machine is leading them towards. It is no longer hierarchy, it is the privilege of power that commands.

Yet, demosophia was the true promise of progress and its domination: one had to achieve a renewed and fulfilled humanity, just, peaceful and capable of something other than enduring and suffering. However, the vast majority of humanity of our time does nothing but suffer. Some because they are visibly and cruelly deprived of the comfort of others, others because they find no strength, no breath of life in the gigantic and incomprehensible machinery that poisons their existence as much as it claims to emancipate them.



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3

The promise was wrong - unless we old demosophers or demosophists have understood nothing, and a whole other humanity is being prepared, becoming part of the great machinery. And we are incapable of imagining this.

It is true that there are a great number of human beings on earth to whom various forms of religion, beliefs, ritual observances furnish the necessary standards, the strengths and the breaths without which we do not exist. May the gods and spirits of each community watch over it. However, it is not easy to understand nor especially to manage the co-presence and interference of such divergent or even contradictory forms of existential resources.

In fact, on the one hand the demos seems to have lost all that could give it form and consistency. On the other hand, the sophia seems to have been transferred to a general computation of algorithms. On both sides the vigour of desire – which always turns to the incalculable – gives way to the rigour of calculation. And yet, no one knows what it would be a question of calculating, if not the computational capacities themselves.

Thus, we will not keep the term “demosophia”: it should only be used to point out the promise that has remained fallow. The modern history of mankind, at the moment when it closes in on the history of a world both



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intra-
connected
and deprived of
representation of
itself, presents us with
two empty forms: "people" and
"thought". That is, existence and
meaning. We know only one thing: the
two sets are either close to disappearing into
another reality –made up of populations and
calculations – or to appearing in a wholly new light of
which we still suspect nothing. This is why "democracy"
and "philosophy" are once again the double, perhaps
anachronistic, name for what can no longer be a promise but becomes
an emergency.

POST-SCRIPTUM

It is all the less necessary to keep “demosophia” as it is essential to consider what remains after this lexico-surgery. There remains this other compound: philocracy. That is, the love of power. Now a demosophia which would be a true thought of the people, by them and for them, should above all hold in respect this philocratia which is one of the most powerful factors of human conduct. This doesn't mean that no power is needed, but that the love of power must be controlled, channeled, instructed according to another love, that of life and speech. This is what democracy & philosophy must consider together.