

## VALUES AS A PRECONDITION OF DEMOCRACY

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### SUMMARY

#### I. TWO DEMOCRACIES

When we speak of democracy today, this word has at least two meanings: democracy in form and democracy in the mind, i.e. democracy as a form of rule and democracy as a mental attitude.

#### II. DEMOCRACY AS A FORM OF RULE AND PREREQUISITE VALUES

2.1. Democracy as a form of rule is an institution to administer a social group, and in particular to decide the will of the people as a whole. The value-criterion for choosing this institution, therefore, must be adaptability or suitability for this purpose. To employ M. Weber's terminology, it is "*Zweckrationalität*", not "*Wertrationalität*".

The purpose here lies solely in decision-making and effective administration of a social group. Democracy is a means to achieve this. Whether democracy or autocracy is more suitable largely depends on the time, the place and the people. It would be impossible to *a priori* attribute an absolute superiority to either one.

Granted that the democratic system contains a sort of self-control mechanism of social powers which does not exist under dictatorship, this mechanism does not always function justly and effectively. In order for a democracy to work successfully, certain ethical conditions must be satisfied.

2.2. Firstly, the formation of the group-will in a democracy must be carried out through discussion or dialogue. This dialogue involves decision-making and value-judgement, and can be based neither upon absolutism nor upon relativism in terms of values. If an absolute and universal truth could be accepted without reservation by anyone, dialogue itself would become quite unnecessary.

It is precisely for this reason that democracy is frequently associated with value-relativism. However, if there were no common value-criterion to be recognized by its members, and if value-judgement were thus utterly relative, dialogue would become meaningless and, in addition, logically impossible.

The dialogue indispensable for democracy can thus be based neither upon absolutism nor upon relativism in terms of values. The view of value which makes dialogue possible stands between the two extremes. The view considered here proposes that there is certain universal truth but that no one can grasp it completely. The principle that must prevail in dialogue is the consciousness of the imperfect nature of human perception.

2.3. Secondly, democratic decision-making is carried out by means of such institutions as voting, participation and, in a large group, representation, and, in order to allow them to operate justly and effectively, certain ethical conditions must be met in each institution. Among the most important requirements, at least two must be mentioned here.

One is respect for the opinion of the minority. The reason for this lies in the fact that a decision by the majority is only an expedient which has been devised in order to decide the general will. Since no one knows the absolute truth, it is thus entirely possible that the truth can in fact have been grasped by the minority.

The other is that under indirect democracy representatives and leaders must be trusted by their supporters and followers. Whether a society can be really democratic or not ultimately depends on the presence of trustworthy relations. Confucius's words "a state can not continue to exist without trust" apply to democracy as well.

### III. DEMOCRACY AS A MENTAL ATTITUDE AND PREREQUISITE VALUES

3.1. Nowadays democracy is not only adopted as a form of rule, but often as a mental attitude as well. In this case, democracy denotes a way of thinking where everyone is equally a person precisely because they are human beings. Democracy in this sense is good in its own right, i.e. an end in itself, beyond being an instrumental value.

What, then, is a person? According to the well-known definition by Boetius, it is the "*rationalis naturae individua substantia*". Although all beings with the exception of man are individuals, each man is a person beyond being a mere individual. The decisive factor which distinguishes man from other beings, therefore, must be the rational or spiritual nature of human beings. It is here that the dignity of man must also be found.

3.2. In the ancient Greek polis, where countless slaves were kept, such an idea did not exist, and precisely for this reason Athenian democracy was only a democracy in terms of political form. This idea of the person was provided and consolidated in a religious sense by the Christian teaching that man as a person is an "*imago Dei*". The personal elements of man, however, have been naturally recognized by almost all nations, however different their forms of expression may be.

3.3. Among the social-ethical values that modern democracy has constructed together with the idea of human dignity and rights, are liberty, equality and fraternity. These concern the way man as a person exists.

As man is a person with rational nature, his conduct comes to be characterized by its autonomy, i.e. by the human being's ability to recognize, compare, judge and

decide his conduct by himself. Human liberty, therefore, in its true sense, must be autonomy.

Secondly, each human being must be respected as a person. At this level, all human beings are equal and must be treated equally. If man leads an autonomous existence, however, his way of living cannot but take the form of diversity. In short, every individual must be equal in his status as a person but his way of living must diverge from that of others. Thus it is that equalization has to be limited to matters concerning the status of man as a person. Any attempt to equalize men's way of living is incompatible with human liberty.

Fraternity constitutes another characteristic of the way man as a person exists. Without fraternity man as a person withers, and with it man as a person enriches himself. And if each person has equal dignity as a person, then one must respect and care for others, just as much as for oneself.

#### IV. MODERN DEMOCRACY AND VIEW OF VALUE

4.1. Decentralized democratic institutions, in entrusting the right of decision to each of their members, conform in practice to the idea of the autonomous person. It was thus natural that modern democracy, which was bound up with Christian humanism, should have arisen, grown and then matured in the Western world.

4.2. The view of value which has prevailed in Europe during the modern age, however, has on the whole been individualistic.

In the sphere of epistemology or ontology the emphasis on the individual brought about a nominalism and a scepticism which resulted in value-relativism. In the social sphere it soon came to promote the individualistic reorganization of society. Following such a trend of thought, modern democracy has become individualist-liberalistic in character, and this individualistic development of democracy has brought with it great fruits but also new problems as well. Let us discuss here two of these fundamental problems.

One is a self-contradictory development. Under the influence of individualism, liberty has been taken as almost synonymous with "freedom from" (liberation), and by this route liberation from political, social and even moral regulations has been pursued. As a result, there has been a decline into a situation which is almost contrary to human autonomy, i.e. to self-control. Individual rights have been exclusively asserted, and their guarantee has been claimed one by one, until it has been thought that a state which secures the individual's whole life is the ideal state (the welfare state!). This ideal, too, is almost contrary to human autonomy.

The second problem is more tragic in character. If democracy is bound up with value-relativism, then the democracy which allows freedom of speech will come to be unable to reject even anti-democratic doctrine. In this way democracy can be discarded and replaced by a dictatorship through a perfectly democratic procedure. This is, as it were, the suicide of democracy.

4.3. In order for modern democracy to overcome its problems, what is necessary from the viewpoint of the theory of value? Given the above, the direction to be taken will be a conversion from individualism to personalism.

Firstly, the autonomy and fraternity of man as a person will have to be recovered. Today it is necessary for democracy to consolidate the sense of responsibility connected with freedom and the sense of duty connected with rights. At the same time, it is also important that a sense of fraternity (or solidarity) is strengthened and that mutual help or voluntary cooperation is increased.

Secondly, it is self-evident that the most important matter of all is the continual reconfirmation of the basic mental attitude of democracy, namely the dignity of man as a person. If this central element is denied or lacking, democracy, even as a form, will lose its *raison d'être* and end up by being a dead letter. The future of democracy depends upon how widely and to what extent this basic democratic attitude can be upheld and recovered.

## I. TWO DEMOCRACIES

### 1.1. *Democracy in Form and Democracy in the Mind*

When we speak of democracy today, this word has at least two meanings. One expresses democracy in form and the other democracy in the mind.<sup>1</sup>

1.1.1. In the first case, democracy means an institution for political or social administration, above all a way to determine the will of the whole, as is usually the case when a state is called a democratic nation. This applies today not only to a political body but also to other social organizations. In both, democracy indicates a form of administration of a social group in which all members participate in all stages of decision-making and the majority usually makes the decision. The form of democracy that was born with its own word (*demokratia*) in ancient Greece is defined solely in this sense.

The value-criteria for choosing this institution are based on instrumentality, i.e. adaptability or suitability for the purpose in hand, because in this case democracy is only a way, a method, to make a decision or to administer. Whether it is suitable or not depends largely upon historical, social, and cultural circumstances.

1.1.2. In daily life, however, the word "democracy" is often used in another sense. This is the case, for example, when one says that one's father

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<sup>1</sup> A discussion on democracy involving a distinction between the form and the mind of democracy was first engaged in by a Japanese Catholic economist, B. Iijima. Cf. B. Iijima, 'Kiristokyo no Shakaikan', *The Christian Social View*, 1965.

is democratic, or that one's boss is undemocratic. In this case the word "democracy" is used to denote one's attitude or behaviour towards other people, and it is basically related to one's mentality. This democracy of the mind is the attitude of respecting everybody equally, insofar as they are human beings. In other words, it is the concept of humanism which itself supports the idea of human dignity.

This kind of democracy was quite absent from the polis of ancient Greece, where countless slaves were kept who were not treated in the same way as other human beings. In Europe, this attitude originated undoubtedly from the Christian teaching that man alone is an "*imago Dei*".

### 1.2. Possible Types of Regime

If democracy thus implies two meanings, it is logically possible to conceive the following four types of regime.

#### 4 Types of Regime

Form \ Mind	Democratic	Undemocratic
Democratic	A	B
Undemocratic	C	D

- A: Democratic regime and democratic attitudes.
- B: Democratic regime in form, but undemocratic attitudes.
- C: Undemocratic regime in form, but democratic attitudes.
- D: Undemocratic regime and undemocratic attitudes.

Type A is the ideal of modern democracy. Democratic systems which operate without respect for the human value of people but only by social power, as for example in such democracies where the majority pays no heed to the minority and imposes its own will upon it, belong to Type B. By contrast, a monarchy under an enlightened benevolent ruler, or an autocratic organization managed by a competent and humanistic leader, would come under Type C. Type D is so-called tyranny. Ancient empires, pre-modern despotism and even in the modern age totalitarian states repeatedly evolved into this type. What values must be provided in order for a democracy to establish itself both as a form of rule and as a mental attitude?

## II. DEMOCRACY AS A FORM OF RULE AND PREREQUISITE VALUES

### 2.1. *Choice of Democratic System and its Criteria of Value*

Democracy as a form of rule is an institution to administer a social group, and in particular to decide the will of the people taken as a whole. Therefore, the value-criteria for choosing this institution, as mentioned above, must be adaptability or suitability for the purpose in hand. In other words, it must be an instrumental value, i.e. rationality as a means. To employ M. Weber's terminology, it is "*Zweckrationalität*", not "*Wertrationalität*".

2.1.1. The purpose here lies solely in decision-making and the effective administration of a social group. Democracy is a means to achieve this. Furthermore, this system is characterized by two features: that the opinions of individual members become very important, and that as a result this system becomes a decentralized system which gives the widest possible room to the free judgment of individual members. For this reason, the democratic system has a tendency to be connected with the individualist or liberalist concept of value.

In contrary fashion, in an autocracy society as a whole is more important than the individual, and a centralized system is built up where individual freedom is restricted or neglected. This system used to be connected with the totalitarian idea.

2.1.2. Which system is more suitable largely depends on the time, the place and the people. It would be impossible to *a priori* attribute an absolute superiority to one of the two, insofar as they are taken as forms of rule. Generally speaking, when a society falls into a critical condition, as is the case in a state of war, or when a newly developing nation rapidly grows to free itself from its underdeveloped condition, a strong leadership is needed and an autocratic system could be more suitable. It should be remembered that even in Western Europe, the homeland of modern democracy, the establishment of the modern nation-state was carried out by despotism, and that many of the developing countries now hastening to modernize themselves have adopted an autocratic system (dictatorship for development).

If a society, however, rids itself of a critical condition, or if a backward nation succeeds in modernizing, they often tend to liberalize and to democratize themselves. This springs from the fact that an autocracy is always subject to the danger of becoming a tyranny, and that an autocratic system, by suppressing individual freedom and thus initiative as well, often becomes economically and socially inefficient. The rise and fall of the

Communist dictatorships which developed throughout the twentieth century has demonstrated this as well.

Granted that the democratic system contains a sort of self-control mechanism of social powers which dictatorship does not, this mechanism, however, does not always function justly and effectively. One should not forget that the Athenian democracy killed Socrates. Citing a more familiar instance, democratic society even in our own days often in reality becomes a monopolistic system dominated by a majority power, or a claim-society (*Anspruchsgesellschaft*) which eventually leads to fiscal bankruptcy.

## 2.2. *Necessary Conditions for a Smooth Functioning of Democracy (1): Dialogue*

In order for a democracy to work successfully, certain ethical conditions must be satisfied.

2.2.1. The formation of the group-will in a democracy must be carried out through discussion or dialogue because democracy as a form of rule is a system where all its members participate in decision-making. This dialogue, which involves decision-making, and thus value-judgment as well, can be based neither upon absolutism nor upon relativism in relation to values.

What is referred to here as value-absolutism is the view that there is an absolute and universal truth and that it can be accepted without reservation by anyone. With such a point of view, dialogue itself would become quite unnecessary. A man who completely grasped the universal truth might be allowed to decide the will of the whole and to enforce it. Such a viewpoint, then, has a tendency to lead to autocracy.

It is precisely for this reason that democracy is frequently associated with value-relativism. This is based upon the view in relation to values that there is no universal value-criterion (nominalism), and that, even if there were such a criterion, no one would be in a position to recognize it (agnosticism). However, if value-judgment were utterly relative and depended upon each individual, what would result from this viewpoint? If there were no common value-criterion which was recognizable by all members of society, dialogue would become meaningless and logically impossible as well because value-relativism would eventually end up as a relativist self-contradiction. The decision-making of a social group would in such a circumstance be left to a struggle between powers and to a mere rule of numbers (majority-rule). Dialogue is not achieved and the result is that democracy becomes increasingly undemocratic.

2.2.2. The dialogue which is indispensable to democracy can thus neither be based upon absolutism nor upon relativism in relation to value. The

view of value which makes dialogue possible stands between these two extremes. The view here considered proposes that there are certain universal value-criteria but that no one can completely grasp them, because, if there were no common universal truth, discussion would be meaningless, whereas, if a particular individual knew the entire truth, discussion would be needless. The principle that must prevail in dialogue is the consciousness of the imperfect nature of human recognition. To think that one's recognition is imperfect presupposes the existence of a common universal value or truth which is to be more completely recognized. This view, therefore, involves some elements of value-absolutism. At the same time, however, it is somewhat value-relativistic, insofar as any recognition is taken as imperfect. To be imperfect is not to be false. And it often happens that a truth only vaguely known in the beginning eventually comes to be clarified. Given this possibility, dialogue becomes both possible and meaningful. The condition necessary for the smooth functioning of democracy, then, must be first of all to try to establish what is the right thing and at the same time to be aware of the imperfect nature of one's own recognition.

### 2.3. *The Necessary Conditions for the Smooth Functioning of Democracy (2): Voting, Participation, and Representation*

Democratic decision-making is carried out by means of such institutions as voting, participation and, in a large group, representation. And in order to allow them to operate justly and effectively, certain conditions of value must be met in each institution.

2.3.1. Apart from the exceptional case of a small group, democratic decision-making in a group is normally carried out by voting. And, at that time, it is usual for the procedure of one vote per person and of decision by the majority to be adopted. This is, however, merely an ideal, because in reality men are never homogeneous, i.e. because each individual has his individual qualities: a person's ability, culture, personal circumstances, etc., are all different from those of other people. This diversity places certain demands on a democracy.

The first and most important point is respect for the opinion of the minority. The reason lies for this lies in the fact that a decision agreed upon by the majority is only an expedient which has been devised in order to decide the will of a whole group. Since no one knows the absolute truth, it is thus entirely possible that the truth can in fact have been grasped by the minority. A decision-making process by a majority that disregards this point could result in dominance by a powerful majority and thus in a kind of autocracy.

The second point, connected with this, is to care particularly for social strata that cannot effectively organize or assert themselves. Without such a concern, such strata will be thrown into underprivileged situations. Thus, even in present-day democracy, the so-called “new poverty” (*neue Armut*) has emerged and constitutes one of the most serious social problems which now exists. Therefore, special consideration for these strata is indispensable in the achievement of a just functioning of democracy.

2.3.2. A further requirement for the just functioning of democracy lies in the participation of almost all the qualified members in the process of voting. Apart from very rare cases, however, it would be unrealistic to expect everyone to participate. The degree of awareness of participation varies among members. A by no means small number of people are indifferent to social or political matters (apathy), or pursue exclusively their own interests, and are not willing to participate in the voting process. The low polling rate that is often deplored at general elections in democratic nations demonstrates this fact. For this reason, it is always necessary in a democracy to stimulate and strengthen people’s interest in public matters and thus in the common good of the whole of society. Furthermore, for the same reason, democracy requires a competent leader who guides people on a sensible course. There has never been a democracy which has operated effectively which has not had good leaders.

2.3.3. In larger social groups, direct democracy becomes not only technically difficult but also inappropriate. In present-day politics, democracy is almost always indirect in character and adopts the representative system with a division of decision-making and its implementation. It is natural here that a representative stands for the interests of his party or of his supporters. But, in this instance, there is always a danger that the particular interests of his party or supporters will be generalized by him as constituting the common interest of the whole of society.

For the just functioning of democracy, a deliberation on the common good is required of the representative, and likewise of all the members of the society concerned. At the same time, the representatives and the leaders must be trusted by their supporters and followers. In the democracy itself, the most decisive point in the end is trust: in an indirect democracy, after discussing at various levels and exercising their voting power, people can do nothing more than trust their representatives or leaders. Whether a society is democratic or not ultimately depends on the presence of trustworthy relations. The Confucian statement “a state cannot continue to exist without trust” must apply to democracy as well.

2.3.4. In addition to the above, two matters should be mentioned. Firstly, certain elements such as concern for the common good, powerful leadership, and trust in political representatives are vital in a democracy. In this respect, there is not really so great a difference between democracy and autocracy. Indeed, these elements become rather more important in the former than in the latter, precisely because in essential terms democracy is a system which presupposes the autonomy of its members.

Secondly, and for the same reason, whether a democracy operates successfully or not depends largely on the educational and cultural level of the people concerned. If it is not above a certain level, neither positive participation nor meaningful discussion will be attainable, and such processes as one vote per person will become a myth. It was natural in this sense that European democracy began with democratic decision-making taking place in the upper classes of society, and that it took a long time before the system of universal suffrage was promulgated.

### III. DEMOCRACY AS A MENTAL ATTITUDE AND PREREQUISITE VALUES

Nowadays democracy is not only seen as a form of rule – it is often a mental attitude. In this case, democracy, as has already been observed, denotes a way of thinking where everyone is equally a person, precisely because they are human beings. Democracy in this sense is good in its own right, i.e. as an end in itself, beyond being merely an instrumental value.

#### 3.1. *Axis of Co-ordinates of Democracy: Human Dignity*

3.1.1. What, then, is a person? According to the most classic and well-known definition of a person, a person is the “*rationalis naturae individua substantia*” (Boetius).<sup>2</sup> Although all beings with the exception of man are individuals, each man is a person beyond being a mere individual. The decisive factor which distinguishes man from other beings, therefore, must be the rational or spiritual nature of human beings. Here, also, is the reason why J. Maritain once distinguished between “*individuum*” and “*persona*”. Although each man is called both an individual and a person, according to this philosopher “individual” is the term which refers to one’s physicality or materiality, and “person” is the term which refers to one’s rationality or spirituality.<sup>3</sup> If such is the case then the human value of man must lie in the

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q 29 a 3.

<sup>3</sup> J. Maritain, *Les Droits de l’Homme et la Loi Naturelle* (1947).

fact that a man is not only an individual but also a person, and it is here that the dignity of man must also lie. For the same reason, the inherent rights of man, designated human rights, too, must originate in the rational nature of man, and thus be based on the dignity of man. Otherwise one would be unable to explain why man, and only man, has such inherent rights.

3.1.2. Has not the idea of the person, together with that of human rights, however, been a matter of historical development? It is certainly the case that in ancient Greece such an idea did not exist, and, precisely for this reason, Athenian democracy was only a democracy in political form. In the history of human thought this idea of the person was supplied by Christianity and consolidated in religious terms by it. As has already pointed out, Christianity teaches that each man as a person (*persona*) is an "*imago Dei*", an image of God as "*personae*", in other words, that something akin to God inhabits each man. If this teaching of human dignity had not existed, modern humanism too might have not been born. It is clear that the idea of human rights based upon human dignity was historically established by Christianity.

This is not to say, however, that outside the Christian world there have been no such ideas whatsoever. For example, St. Thomas' view of the human being, in philosophical terms, was built upon that of Aristotle who defined man as a rational and social animal long before the emergence of Christianity. In our present era, Aristotle's cosmology was also followed by N. Hartmann's theory of stratum of being (*Schichtenlehre*). All of those Aristotelian views place man at the highest rank in the universe and this involves nothing but a statement about the value of the human being. Outside the sphere of Christian culture similar views are to be found. In Japan, for instance, man is called "*hito*" as well as "*ningen*": the former means "the spirit stays" and the latter "being among men". Here, too, is a view of man as a personal and communal being. From those facts alone one can conclude that the personal and communal elements of man have been naturally recognized by almost all nations, however different their forms of expression may have been. It can be said, therefore, that this concept of human nature and its recognition belong to natural law. And, in circumstances where a man is exposed to a critical danger, he will actually feel the existence of natural law. Only the man who lacks such an experience can deny this.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, while human nature itself is universal and immutable, its recognition is changeable. But this change goes

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<sup>4</sup> J. Messner, *Moderne Soziologie und Scholastisches Naturrecht* (1961), p. 12.

on in such a way that what was only vaguely or only partially known comes to be more clearly or widely recognized. St. Thomas spoke of the mutation of the natural law in a mode of “addition”.<sup>5</sup> At any rate, it is impossible that what has been broadly recognized as a human characteristic should wholly disappear, insofar as it truly is a human characteristic. From this point of view, it may be said that human history is the history of the self-recognition of man. And one can understand the ideas of human dignity and rights in this historical process as well. This implies something of decisive importance for the future of democracy because it determines the possibility of expansion of democracy in the world.

### 3.2. *The Existence of Man as a Person and Fundamental Values*

Among the social-ethical values that modern democracy has constructed together with the ideas of human dignity and rights, are to be found liberty, equality and fraternity (*liberté, égalité, fraternité* to employ the slogan of the French Revolution). These are concerned with the way man as a person exists.

3.2.1. The factor determining man as a person consists above all in his rational-spiritual nature. From there human conduct comes to be characterized by its autonomy, i.e. by the human being’s ability to recognize, compare, judge and decide his conduct by himself. Human liberty, therefore, in its true sense, must be autonomy. And, as is the case with autonomy, liberty is bound up with responsibility and rights are bound up with duties. These two pairs are inseparably linked: if one were lacking, the other could not exist. Man as a person is not only the bearer of liberty and rights but also the subject of responsibility and duties.

For this reason, the exclusive assertion of liberty and rights leads in the end to the denial of human autonomy, and thus of man as a person, because the assertion of mere liberty produces a tendency toward the total liberation of instinctive desires, thereby breaking down the self-control of man as a person, and because the assertion of mere right produces an inclination to go so far as to demand an unlimited guarantee for one’s livelihood, this causes the abandonment of the leading of an autonomous life as a person.

3.2.2. Moreover, each human being has the natural right to be respected as a person. From this point of view, all human beings are equal and must

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th.*, I II, q 94 a 5.

be treated equally, regardless of differences in gender, nation, religion, etc. Man as an individual, however, has his own individuality, and the historical, social or cultural environment he lives in is never the same. Therefore, as far as man leads an autonomous life, the way to live cannot but diversify and so becomes manifold. In short, if man is respected as a person, every individual must be equal in his status as a person, but his way of living must diverge from that of others. Thus, equalization will have to be limited in principle to matters concerning the status of man as a person. Such equalization is not merely connected with human liberty but also provides the guarantee for it. Indeed, an attempt to equalize men's way of living is actually incompatible with human liberty because it must injure the autonomy of man as a person.<sup>6</sup> Centrally administered systems both of the right and the left have offered good examples of this relationship.

3.2.3. Furthermore, fraternity constitutes another characteristic of the way man as a person exists. Each man as a person is not a "closed monad" but an "open monad".<sup>7</sup> How open he is decides the fruitfulness of man as a person. Without fraternity man as a person withers, and with it man as a person enriches himself. And, if each man equally has dignity as a person, one must respect and care for others just as much as for oneself. The virtue of fraternity is a natural consequence of the essence of man as a person.

For this point of view, too, as is the case with the idea of person, Christianity laid the religious foundation. Needless to say, in Christianity love is alpha and omega. Since each individual as a person is here equally "*imago Dei*", firstly, human love is based upon divine love, and secondly, love among men is brotherhood (literally fraternity). Outside of Christianity, again, fraternity has been almost always taken to be a vital characteristic of the human being. The core of Buddhism is mercy, and that of Confucius's teaching consideration for others. In Japan a man lacking in consideration for others is called "*hitodenashi*" (is not a man).

The decisive importance that love has for a human being and his life seems to have been universally recognized throughout all ages and in all nations.

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<sup>6</sup> R. Darendorf, 'Reflektionen über Freiheit und Gleichheit', *Hamburger Jahrbuch für Wirtschafts- und Gesellschaftspolitik*, 4, (1959), p. 65. Darendorf here distinguishes between "*Weise der menschlichen Existenz*" and "*Rang der menschlichen Existenz*".

<sup>7</sup> Maritain, *op. cit.*

#### IV. MODERN DEMOCRACY AND VIEW OF VALUE

Historically speaking, modern democracy was born, grew up and matured in Europe. European democracy opened a new chapter in human history but brought with it some severe new problems as well. Why did it grow up in this way? And what is required in order to overcome those problems?

##### 4.1. *Modern Democracy and Individualism*

4.1.1. Although the term democracy came from the democracy of ancient Greece, as has been observed above, this democracy which pre-dated Christianity was confined to democracy as a political form. Its assessment by the Athenian philosophers including Aristotle, not to speak of Plato, was rather negative, and in fact the Athenian polis perished under democracy.

In European history, the idea of the human dignity of a person, which is at the very core of democratic attitudes, was firmly taught and established by Christianity. Even in Christian Europe, however, it took a very long time before democracy became established in the mind as well as in political form. It was during the two hundred years which followed widespread civil revolution, when the absolutist regime was replaced by the democratic state, that European and North American nations established this kind of modern democracy.

The decentralized democratic institutions entrusted the right of decision to each of their members and thereby conformed to the idea of the autonomy of man as a person. It was thus natural that modern democracy, bound up with Christian humanism, bloomed in the Western world.

It must be emphasised here that the most important social theory of that time was the modern teaching of natural law of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Under the influence of this concept, human natural rights, with equality before the law, were institutionalized by law and constitutional democracy thus became established. This was a first in the history of mankind.

4.1.2. Nevertheless, the view of value which has prevailed during the modern age has on the whole been individualistic in character. European modern times began with the self-assertion of the individual during the upheaval of the disintegration of the Medieval. The "universality-debate" which took place at the end of the Medieval age, therefore, had a special importance in the history of thought. In the sphere of epistemology or ontology the emphasis on the individual generated a nominalism and a

scepticism which resulted in value-relativism. In the social sphere it soon came to promote the individualistic reorganization of society. The teaching of modern natural law, which fostered liberalist and socialist concepts as well, was in itself individualistic and rationalistic. Such a tendency cannot be considered marginal if one reflects on the fact that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were a period of revolt against absolute despotism. This individualism could then make a great contribution toward the social and political movement of the time, which aimed to push forward the idea of human rights and to propel the transformation of absolute monarchy into a democratic system. This is how modern democracy became individualistic-liberalistic in character, and this individualistic development of democracy brought with it great fruits but new problems as well.

#### 4.2. *The Weak Points of Individualistic Democracy*

4.2.1. It has already been observed that the assertions of mere right and of mere liberty must lead to abandonment of the autonomy of man as a person, something which actually supplies the foundation to those assertions. Such a situation is apt to take place under individualistic liberal democracy, because here the individual's rights and liberty are pushed forward and both come to be asserted one-sidedly.

In fact, liberty has been taken always as almost synonymous with "freedom from" (liberation), and thus the liberation from political, social and even moral regulations has been pursued. As a result, one's instinctive desires have been more and more liberated and one has fallen into the situation almost contrary to the human autonomy, that is, to self-control as a person.

If man has natural rights, he must have natural duties as well. In practice, however, rights have been asserted exclusively, and their guarantee has been claimed, one by one, until it has been thought that a state which secures the individual's whole life is the ideal state (the welfare state!). This ideal, too, is almost contrary to human autonomy.

On the other hand, the concept of equality, in relation to the claim for rights, has been often extended to real equality, and thus the equalization of actual life-styles has been advocated. This, however, means equalization of ways of living, and, as has already been observed, must come to injure the liberty of man as a person. In fact, it opened the road to Communist serfdom by ignoring human autonomy and dignity.

Furthermore, the assertion of mere right always produces a tendency to produce various areas of antagonism among men, and, even if it does not do this, to extend human relations based on contract into a "market

society” or “economy-oriented society” which lack human affections.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, through the formation of the masses and of their interest-groups which are organized on the basis of the democratic freedom of association, individualism frequently changes into group-individualism and democracy into organized mass-democracy.<sup>9</sup> Under parliamentary democracy with its many parties which represent group-interests, it happens that as a result of the ceaseless expansion in claims by pressure groups administrative work increases steadily and finally brings about a fiscal crisis. At the same time a “new poverty” emerges among those people who can not organize themselves effectively. This also brings about a society where human autonomy and fraternity wither.

4.2.2. When the individual in a wide sense enters into the sphere of epistemology or ontology, as has already been observed, nominalism and agnosticism – forces which deny universal reality or the possibility that it can be recognized intellectually – gain ground. They lead to the relativistic view of values. When we come to consider the individualistic current within modern thought, it does not appear strange that modern democracy and value-relativism have often combined with one another. This implies, however, some problems which are of fundamental importance for democracy.

4.2.3. The first problem has been already mentioned. If there are no more or less universal value-criteria, or if they cannot be recognized, the dialogue which is indispensable to democratic decision-making becomes impossible. There remains only a power struggle, or at best only a compromise between powers. In fact, modern democracy has usually worked along these lines. The second problem is more serious. If value-criterion and thus value-judgment are utterly relative or subjective, then democracy, by admitting freedom of speech, will be unable to reject anti-democratic doctrine. If this is the case, then democracy can be discarded and replaced by a dictatorship through a perfectly democratic procedure. This is, as it were, the suicide of democracy.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, we have experienced such a tragedy during this century.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (1957); E. Heimann, *Soziale Theorie der Wirtschaftssysteme* (1963).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. G. Briefs, ‘Staat und Wirtschaft im Zeitalter der Interessenverbände’ in G. Briefs (ed.), *Laissez-faire-Pluralismus* (1966).

<sup>10</sup> For this reason even F. Fukuyama, who, faced with the collapse of Communist dictatorship, proclaimed the triumph of “liberal democracy” and found there “the end of history” of the struggle between social systems, could not ignore this danger of the suicide of democracy. Cf. F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), last chapter.

### 4.3. *The Overcoming of Problems and Preconditions of Values – from Individualism to Personalism.*

For a modern democracy to overcome its problems and rid itself of its contradictions, what is necessary from the viewpoint of the theory of value? Considering the above, the direction to be taken will be clear: it must involve a shift from individualism to personalism.<sup>11</sup>

4.3.1. First of all, the autonomy and fraternity (or solidarity) of man as a person will have to be recovered. As already been seen, human liberty originally consists in autonomy, and human rights are inseparably bound up with human duties. Today it is necessary for democracy to consolidate the sense of responsibility connected with liberty and the sense of duty connected with rights. At the same time, it is also important that a sense of solidarity is strengthened and mutual help or voluntary cooperation is increased. This is because another characteristic of man as a person lies in fraternity. In advanced nations, after the “bankruptcy of the welfare state”, many organizations dedicated to self-help or mutual help, so-called NGOs or NPOs, were established in rapid succession, and the voluntary sector within society is now rapidly extending its range. These events offer us the hope that the demands of solidarity and fraternity will be met.

In truth, if man as an autonomous person must be the axis of the coordinates of a whole society, the functions that the state, or more specifically the administration, should perform must be in principle be that of supplementing, not securing, the person’s life (the subsidiarity principle). In this sense, it is desirable for the state to be as small as possible. The state, however, must be strong enough to be able to perform the agenda (what should be done) and not to see to the non-agenda (what should not be done). In short, it should be a “small but strong state”. Against this, many of the present states under organized mass-democracy are, as it were, a “large but weak state”, because they are usually moved by pressure groups and obliged to expand their functions up to the point of bankruptcy. The transformation which should be implemented now is that of a shift from a “large but weak state” to a “small but strong state”. This change corresponds to the above-mentioned transition from individualism to personalism. To follow a Hegelian dialectical form of expression, one may be able to speak of a negation of the individualistic negation of the original community. This amounts to the recovery of man as a person, and nothing else.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. also A. Utz, *Zwischen Neoliberalismus und Neomarxismus. Die Philosophie des Dritten Weges* (1975), which advocates social personalism as the third way beyond both Liberalism and Marxism - typically modern social conceptions.

4.3.2. In conclusion, one need hardly observe that the most important matter of all is the continual reconfirmation of the fundamental attitude of democracy – the dignity of man as a person. If this central element is denied or lacking, then democracy, even as a form, will lose its *raison d'être* and end up by being a dead letter. A just and effective working of the democratic institutions depends upon how much of the fundamental democratic attitude can be recovered.

What will be of decisive importance, therefore, in the future of democracy, is whether the fundamental democratic attitude and human dignity become more universally recognized. In this context, the three points already mentioned should be emphasized once again:

- (1) Both absolutism and relativism of value must be kept in balance. And here the logic of imperfection will be instructive.
- (2) Although the idea of human dignity may have been established by Christianity, it has also existed in various forms outside Christian cultures as well. And, once achieved, it has never been lost.
- (3) This process shows that the idea of human dignity has come from human nature itself, and not from a historical event, i.e. it belongs to natural law and not only to positive law.

For these reasons, it is to be expected that democracy will become more universalized, even if the number of such states varies due to differences in historical and social conditions.