

THE IDEA OF A DEMOCRATIC STATE. PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS. PROLEGOMENA

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Purpose: The aim of this publication is to attempt to formulate the philosophical foundations of the idea of the democratic state from an ontological, anthropological, and axiological perspective. The article outlines a theoretical framework that enables a deeper understanding of democracy not merely as a political mechanism, but as a specific conception of the human being, freedom, and community.

Methodology: The publication is theoretical in nature and is based on an analysis of the subject literature. The applied method enabled familiarization with the current state of knowledge regarding existing concepts related to the discussed issues. This not only allows for indicating the scope of the considerations undertaken but also for delineating areas that require further inquiry. Thus, the conducted analysis points to potential directions for future research and formulates open questions that may become the subject of in-depth reflection in subsequent studies.

Findings: From a historical perspective, the democratic system is primarily a project based on the European intellectual elite's way of thinking about who a human being is, who an individual is, and who a citizen is. Today, we are the beneficiaries of this way of thinking about human subjectivity. The publication discusses the abstract values - freedom, equality, autonomy, subjectivity - on which the idea of a democratic state is based.

Social consequences: The publication discusses the conditions necessary for the development of democracy and the assumptions concerning its essence that have a direct impact on the social space in which individuals can fully exercise their freedom, dignity, and agency, i.e., actively shape the world in which they live while being protected from the threats posed by arbitrary power or the tyranny of the majority. The publication points out that a democratic state is an important reference point for building a contemporary normative order, creating the foundations for the development of authentic social bonds based on mutual trust, dialogue, and citizens' shared responsibility for the common good.

Originality: The publication essentially raises a question about the intellectual condition of a human being functioning on the boundary between two orders: the world of nature and the social world. In a human as a *zoon politikon*, a profound drama of human existence is revealed, which is an attempt to reconcile conflicting values. In this context, democracy represents an intellectual effort to resolve this existential conflict of the dual nature of man, it is a response to the effort to master innate instincts driving him towards destruction, as well as the deeply rooted temptation to build a perfect world.

Keywords: democracy, the idea of a democratic state, freedom, autonomy, community, subjectivity, humanity.

Category of the paper: conceptual paper, viewpoint.

Introduction

European thought, from its philosophical foundations to the present day, has continually grappled with the question of human nature in relation to oneself, to others, and to the world. The cultural code of the European is rooted in the conception of the human being as an autonomous entity, endowed with the will to understand and the capacity to make choices, choices that can shape one's existence but can also lead to its dehumanization. This axiological and anthropological dimension of being European constitutes the values that underpin the modern democratic order. It is precisely this order, exemplified by the contemporary democratic state, that situates the human being, the European, within a vision where one is no longer merely a citizen subject to power, but transcends that subtle boundary to become a conscious, decision-making participant in the political community, the form of which depends on one's engagement and responsibility. Democracy, and the modern democratic state in particular, is a political and social phenomenon that not only organizes collective life but, above all, enables the realization of human freedom, subjectivity, and dignity (Novak, 1998). It is therefore difficult to ignore that democracy is, first and foremost, a way of thinking, one that has developed over centuries as a reflection on the human being, the community, and power. In this sense, European democracy becomes an existential project: a mindset that goes beyond elections or constitutions. It is a readiness to recognize the other as an equal partner and active fellow citizen. Democracy thus represents the power of an idea that transcends all previous historical experiences of humanity in constructing social reality. It is an idea aimed at constantly expanding the space for dialogue and social participation, a space in which the human being can fully exist as a person (Sadurski, 2023). From a historical perspective, man struggles with the duality of his own nature: on the one hand endowed with reason and the capacity for transcendence, on the other marked by aggressive instincts and the drive for survival, which often bring him to the brink of dehumanization. Civilization's evolution is, to a large extent, the history of gradually taming and channeling these corrupting forces (Jaeger, 2025). Democracy, as a form of social organization, plays a unique role in this process. It ceases to be merely a mechanism for exercising power and becomes, above all, a space for the sublimation of impulses and the creation of conditions for peaceful coexistence among people who differ in interests, beliefs, or temperament (Zielonka, 2023). European democracy, as a political and moral experiment, remains an unfinished project, lacking final clarification both on the axiological and institutional levels. Tocqueville had already pointed this out, writing that

democracy is an open-ended process, constantly in the making. As a projection of our human and intellectual struggles, this lack of definitive precision in democracy is by no means a sign of weakness; on the contrary, it testifies to its agency and creativity, and it is the very source of its flexibility and capacity for adaptation. Claude Lefort observed that democracy is a regime of the empty place (Sawicka, 2013), which is why Europe, from this perspective, has always been more of a path than a solution, more of an idea than a model system of practical arrangements. An idea, because its strength lies and has always lain in the enduring vitality of the desire to uncover the unconditionally binding conditions of being, which is the human person. And that is why, as Paul Ricoeur notes, Europe must continually reinvent itself (Ricoeur, 2007).

The Europe Project: The Philosophy of Democracy

The modern democratic rule-of-law state was shaped as a result of the religious conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as Enlightenment philosophical thought, which sought an effective antidote to tame the destructive passions of human nature. The Enlightenment, in contrast to previous eras that built their visions of the future on conflict and the supremacy of force, undertook an intellectual effort to liberate societies from the vicious cycle of tyranny, violence, and aggression. Its goal was to establish lasting, solid, and well-founded mechanisms, rooted in values and ideas, that would enable human relations to be based on safe and predictable rules of coexistence. The inertia of perpetual conflict was replaced by the Enlightenment with a climate of intellectual emancipation from the bonds of immature passions, a climate in which the Europe we know today, and with which we identify, was to be constituted. From that moment, the Enlightenment began its march toward an endless, ever-unfinished intellectual journey aimed at developing socially valuable and desirable virtues and values that would minimize the sources of destruction and aggression inherent in human nature and build a spacious, multi-layered space for authentic personal relationships, relationships that would draw out the latent potential for moral maturity within humans and activate the vast wealth of possibilities that refine existence and elevate it above animal instincts. These two processes, significant in their consequences for Europe, combined to constitute an axiological order organizing the life of the modern individual and citizen, as well as the order shaping the structure of contemporary society (Dahl, 2012). The concept of organizing society according to the democratic model, although statistics are not optimistic and do not indicate its rapid global spread in the near future, remains so appealing and attractive that, as L. Kołakowski points out, it is significant that so many of its guiding ideas have been verbally accepted worldwide, its institutional forms are imitated in words, and tyrannical regimes strive to use European slogans and rhetoric, hence: “the ridiculous and clumsy efforts

to give oneself European appearances and to dress in Western costumes testify that, if the barbarism of totalitarianism is by no means defeated, the shame of being that barbarian has become widespread, and whoever is ashamed of their barbarism is already half defeated, even when the other half resists strongly” (Kołakowski, 1984, p. 20). The affirmation of democratic culture allowed Europe to build a powerful institutional arsenal and a spiritual foundation that not only enabled the survival of this culture and the development of an extraordinarily creative civilizational and technological potential but, above all, helped to tame and overcome the sources of its own European barbarism. This barbarism is understood as the reluctance to question one’s own exclusivity, as the temptation to assert ethnocentric closure, and finally as barbarism expressed in a fanatical stance defending one’s own tradition without willingness to consider reasons other than one’s own. Since the eighteenth century, a hallmark of Europe has thus been the ability to question itself and abandon its exclusivity in favor of seeking codes that allow the discovery of the meaning and value of its own culture and to develop reflection on the legitimacy of claims to spiritual superiority. This metaphysical state, because it finds no support in logical and utilitarian criteria, has initiated a process that continues to this day: a perpetual self-criticism of Europe’s own cultural heritage, a process that is the source both of the almost unlimited creative dynamism of this culture, its growth in power and strength, and of its often tragically consequential susceptibility to its own weaknesses and cruelty. A defining feature of European culture remains its tendency to question, which consequently mobilized the intellectual potential enabling its survival, shaping, and creative development across many fields and directions. It is precisely because Europe has questioned its own achievements, and not despite doing so, that it has defined its unique position and built its distinctiveness in ideological, intellectual, and systemic dimensions. Europe’s state of uncertainty and perpetual incompleteness constitutes its very essence and developmental prospects, for “ultimately, one might say that European cultural identity asserts itself in the refusal to accept any completed form of identification, and thus in uncertainty and anxiety” (Kołakowski, 1984, p. 15). This process has proven to be a path out of aggressive tribalism, expressing this thought in Kantian terms, from a state of self-incurred immaturity toward breaking through ethnocentric closure, shedding self-assurance, and abandoning seductive complacency that pushes the human being into existential inertia, threatening with annihilating intellectual and moral void. This capacity for self-questioning constitutes the uniqueness of Europe, because to suspend one’s own moral or aesthetic norms and customs is to face the perspective of the Other and come closer to assimilating his way of perception, and this, consequently, opens up the possibility of dialogue, taking into account different rationales, different values and normative systems, fosters integration and understanding, and most importantly resists the temptation of confrontation, eliminates the criterion of conflict and the forces mobilizing negatively so far the potential and energies of many generations of Europeans (Judt, 2012). Europe is a project of philosophical speculation and reflection that affirms not so much the act of suspending cultural norms, but the mature act of facing the limiting patterns

and orthodoxies of one's own, freeing oneself from normative prejudices in order to see the Other and abandon the spirit of superiority and fanaticism. European culture survived precisely because, questioning itself, it saw the perspective of the Other in a wide field of vision, and thus discovered in itself the ability to abandon its own exclusivity. In this wide field of vision of the Other, she saw through herself as in a mirror, and looking at herself through his eyes, she made an effort to understand the Other, as she learned to question herself, and is certainly still learning. In this effort to understand the Other lies the essence, essential value and vitality of European culture. For what could have remained confined only to nihilistic, tribal dogmatism, an ephemeral construct, exhausting itself in primitive ideologized forms, came to fruition as a moral and intellectual project affirming the value of abstract ideas constituting the identity of Europe and Europeans (Ricoeur, 2007). Abstract ideas created the spirit of Europe, that is, the sense of community, identity and identification, that is, the manifestation of its autonomy in spite of heterogeneity, differentiation, for in this conglomerate of diversity is revealed precisely the unity of European culture and a clear awareness of its own cultural identity. This was possible because these abstract ideas, shaping the spirit of Europe, essentially helped to restrain and overcome the destructive passions of impulsive and unruly human nature and somewhat control the inclination embedded in the structure of human existence toward a mentality of conflict and confrontation, that persistent tendency to exploit and privilege the mentality of the argument of force (Hadot, 2018). Therefore, it is difficult to overestimate this concept of abstract ideas, because without it, the perspective of the temptation to succumb to passions reveals a sphere of existential anxiety, which threatens a dangerous reductionism of human existence governed or conditioned by biological drive mechanisms, reducing this existence to a reified, accidental, labile, and utilitarianly conditioned structure, exhausted only in the formula of social Darwinism, beyond which the extraction and understanding of the complexity of human existence on a transcendent, spiritual level becomes impossible, does not exist. In this continuous and difficult transcendence of biological drives, the code of being European is revealed each time – a human becomes an autonomous being in relation to the material world, endowed with the will to know and the ability to make choices that either create or dehumanize their existence. The goal is to achieve the best way of being human, which from the European perspective translates, among other things, into the principle that no person has the right to rule over another: “freedom seems to have ‘changed its place’ within the human: it is no longer the freedom of the will, that is, the freedom of one of the human faculties, but the freedom of man as such – an essential component of his humanity, and even its foundation” (Tischner, 1999, p. 133). This goal is a priority and a challenge, especially since not all of our behavior is equally human, affirming the ability to control our own actions, because “what is human is always connected with wickedness, with a depraved modification of oneself” (Plessner, 1988, p. 258). Europe defended itself by finding a solution in breaking its own exclusivity, radically overcoming limiting mental addictions and a model deliberative structure affirming the value of questioning (Judt, Snyder, 2013). Thanks to this, Europe is

possible as a phenomenon of cultural heritage, whose vector is directed towards the idea of progress and development, becoming from now on a customary rule and almost an obsession for subsequent generations. Therefore, Europe is possible as a model, as a radical break with the monopoly of political, social, and religious dogmas, Europe as liberating and initiating a continuous process of change provoking the search for new sources of knowledge, directions of development, and openness to new solutions, and finally, Europe is possible as a liberating structure, freeing us from the tensions of Eurocentrism, that is, from the tempting illusion that Europeans have no reason to be interested in the rest of the world and that Europe's calling is to rule the world forever, an illusion that could threaten the stagnation of its creative potential and destroy the sources of its vitality (Kołakowski, 1984). Europe has effectively avoided and continues to avoid the pitfalls of tribal consciousness and the intricacies of deceptive ideological certainties, finding within itself the codes for recognizing its own axiology, which opposes and clearly rejects the archetype of the tribal model that is exhausted in the finite structure of being a barbarian (Fromm, 1996). The uniqueness of European culture lies in this opposition to its own barbarism, in this reflection on the essence of achieving the best way of being human, a reflection that is a manifestation of the specificity and distinctiveness of European culture. European culture is a pioneer in this matter, because by seeking the barbarian outside its own cultural codes, looking for him beyond the horizon of its own geographical and mental boundaries, certainly in confrontation with him, and thus the Other, the stranger, i.e., the barbarian, and identifying the threat posed by him, it paradoxically saw his face in its own face and recognized the barbarian in itself. This peculiarity of its own culture allowed for deeper reflection, revealing and confronting the destructiveness of its own European expansionism. This was a turning point in the history of Europe and its culture-shaping influence (Wallerstein, 2007). The energies of European expansionism were slowed down and ultimately, at least partially, tamed and redirected towards alternative paths of affirmative, peaceful concepts of universalism, solidarity, pluralism, i.e. democracy, which confirms Kant's intuition that democracies do not fight each other, an intuition on which later theories of democratic peace were based (Kant, 1995). The motif of one's own barbarism, the attempt to confront it, the awareness that I am it, that I may turn out to be the one I want to confront, fight and combat, gives rise to two attitudes: on the one hand, defensive self-affirmation of one's own identity and the declaration of one's own distinctiveness, but on the other hand, at the opposite pole, there is an attitude of uncertainty, the abandonment of indefensible dogmas, an effort to abandon the illusion of perfection, as a consequence, the ability to observe and tame one's own weaknesses is born, an affirmation of the belief that there are no definitive solutions. What was supposed to be her weakness turned out to be her strength, on which she built her unprecedented history and unique value. In this process, something else was revealed that had been imprinted in its genetic makeup and has since defined its character, namely questioning, incompleteness, and uncertainty (Kołakowski, 1984). Paradoxically, identifying its own "barbarian" face was one of the key mechanisms that helped Europe overcome tribal inertia, build its own identity,

define civilizational boundaries, and stimulate cultural, scientific, and political development. Confrontation with the “other within oneself”, which often forced Europeans to reflect on themselves, led to a redefinition of values and, as a consequence, not only provoked multifaceted cultural changes, but also consolidated the fundamental core of civilization based on the rejection of tribal structures once and for all in favor of building an identity striving to create universalistic structures (Vernant, 1996). European culture is a complex intellectual and existential structure, a laboratory for the realization of humanistic ideas and abstract values, for testing many different political and social models, for the clash of philosophical concepts and universalist projects, and for experiments in civilizational inclusiveness. and the sum of all these elements shapes the axiological foundations of its functioning and sets the paradigm for thinking about the standards of European culture (Brague, 2012).

In varietate concordia

The intellectual legacy of this project, which is Europe in its institutional dimension, is the modern democratic state, which is primarily an expression of the idea of human empowerment, which realizes and values the individual as an autonomous entity with dignity, rights, and influence on the surrounding social and political reality. Democracy also constitutes the figure of the citizen, who is no longer a subject but a partner in social relations and a co-host of public life, a participant in the decision-making process and a guardian of their own rights. Man and citizen are the fundamental ideas of democracy and the democratic state, in which a dynamic and expressive interpretation of subjectivity is realized as a causative factor, constituting the existential, moral, social, and political code of democratic culture. This code is understood as the source of individual sovereignty and the axiology of a political community in which the state is the common good of all citizens: “the peoples of the East knew only that one man is free, the world of Greece and Rome that some men are free, but we believe that all men are free, in themselves, that is, that man is free as man” (Hegel, 1958, p. 29). Therefore, to paraphrase anthropologist W. Goodenough, it can be said that democracy is permanently established as a value and as a system if it is firmly rooted in people's minds and hearts. The modern democratic state often appears as a consequence of political history, the struggle for civil liberties, and the development of legal institutions, or through the prism of institutions, electoral procedures, and the legal framework for the functioning of civil society. However, what today seems to be the foundation, an unconditional and indisputable value regulating the life of modern man, has much deeper roots, because democracy cannot be reduced to a set of external rules and formulas. Democracy is a way of thinking, a specific reflectiveness shaped by a rich philosophical tradition (Woźniakowski, 2004). Behind its material dimension lies a deeper, metaphysical foundation that gives meaning to the existence

and functioning of democracy. Democracy is therefore not merely a technique of governance, a set of procedures, or a system for organizing power, but rather a form of organizing social life that is based on a specific vision of the human being, community, and the order of being. Consequently, it is also an embodiment of certain ideas and beliefs that are transcendent in relation to social and political reality: “intellectual freedoms and democratic procedures are safeguards against power and arbitrariness, but they also and perhaps above all, offer an opportunity to make people wiser, more rational, and more moral” (Aron, 1997, p. 201). The modern democratic state, with its complex legal, political, and social structures, is the outcome of a long and complex historical process whose roots reach deep into the metaphysical foundations of Western thought (de Rougemont, 1999). Reflections on the nature of reality, human existence, and social order have for centuries shaped concepts of power, justice, and rights that have ultimately found expression in modern democratic systems (Freeman, 2007). Contemporary democratic states are thus not primarily material constructs but metaphysical ones, embodying ideas such as freedom, reason, community, and hope. The durability of democracy is expressed precisely through the ability of these abstract ideas to influence the life of individuals and society; it is these ideas that constitute the vitality and real impact of this concept, thereby guaranteeing individuals the possibility of authentic selfhood within social reality: “those who are imbued with the civic spirit keep agreements and fulfill obligations and do not need to be additionally compelled to do so either by solemn ritual or by ties to those to whom they owe obligations by virtue of belonging to the same segment” (Gellner, 1997, p. 117). A democratic state is only as strong and stable as it is alive as an organism, as long as it constitutes a real environment for the development of the person in all their ontological and axiological depth. A democratic state reduced to a set of procedures dictated by the growing technocratization or resulting from the algorithmization of public life does not realize the potentials expressed through life-giving ideas. Such a reduced formula must pose a threat to the format of democracy, which is, in principle, a moral and ontological space where the transcendental value of the person is expressed. This dangerously weakens the affirmation of the person’s subjectivity and consequently leads to the internal fragmentation of the community: “we are torn between irreconcilable desires: we want less and less of the state, whose supervision and intrusive interference in our affairs we resent, and towards which we feel painfully our own powerlessness; at the same time, we want more and more of the state to defend us against all possible misfortunes, whether they come from nature, society, or ourselves, to guarantee us total security, to take care of our interests, and to support our particular cause against all others” (Kołakowski, 1984, p. 29). Democracy reduced solely to mechanical rules and procedures opposes the ideas on which it was founded; this mechanism hollows out democracy from its values, preserving it as an alienated, static, statue-like entity of formulaic rituals devoid of creative energy, existing as a pressure of reified relations: “the technological situation of our world causes that more and more important social decisions must be made by central power centers and groups of experts, and the sense of individual

powerlessness in relation to the social organism as a whole may increase” (Kołakowski, 1984, p. 239). Democracy constitutes the institutional and moral recognition of man as a free, conscious subject, co-responsible for the fate of the community. Thus, the democratic state appears as an expression of the empowerment of the human person, where this empowerment cannot be limited to a political sense but must primarily manifest as an affirmation of human freedom, dignity, and transcendence, exemplified in legal solutions. In this sense, democracy is a philosophy of social life, expressing the ontological recognition of man as a subject capable of self-aware action, co-creating reality, and transcending external structures: “the idea of rights is essentially nothing other than the idea of virtue applied to political life. Without virtue, there are no great people; without respect for human rights, there are no great nations, nor even societies. For what is the worth of a community of rational and intelligent beings united only by force? There is only one answer today to the question of how to instill the idea of human rights in people and make them aware of it: everyone must be granted certain rights” (Tocqueville, 1996, p. 243). From a metaphysical perspective, man is perceived as *ens rationale et liberum*, a rational and free being. This ontological structure of human existence forms the foundation for shaping social forms that recognize and protect the subjectivity and individuality of the person. Democracy, as a political system, thus emerges from the recognition of man as a being endowed with the capacity for rational choice, participation in the community, and responsibility for the common good. From a metaphysical point of view, man is not merely “one among many”, but *subiectum sui*, the subject of his own existence and action. Therefore, in this sense, democracy is not merely a mechanism for choosing authority but a social structure reflecting a profound truth about man as a subject who is not a contingent being. The democratic state understood in this deeper sense is thus not only a political system but a philosophical affirmation of human subjectivity (Król, 2017). As an expression of empowerment, democracy is based on the metaphysical recognition of the human being as a free, rational, and transcendent creature. In this sense, democracy does not merely serve the human being — it actualizes them. Thus, this empowerment cannot and must not be merely formal; it must reach into the depth of the person, acknowledging their uniqueness and spiritual value in the context of human nature and freedom. Such an understanding of empowerment is reflected both in philosophical reflection and intellectual inquiry, as well as exemplified in the legal and institutional systemic frameworks of democracy (Toffler, 1997). Only then does democracy become something more than the engineering of social life or a practical mechanism, it becomes a space in which the human being can fully exist as a person, a space in which the conditions for their authentic existence are universalized. Thus, democracy as a form of collective life constitutes the fullest tool for guaranteeing the human being the possibility of authentically being oneself in the world, in social and political reality: “I rather sympathize with the Kantian approach, which assumes that all people, each individually, insofar as they are free and share in the transcendental realm of rationality, have the same rights and are bound by the same duties. From this we move directly to the Kantian idea of the human person as an incommensurable value, grounded in

itself and supreme. This assumption may not be sufficient to resolve any particular political issue, but it is quite sufficient to make the distinction between freedom and slavery a matter of rational reflection, rather than one of taste or whim” (Kołakowski, 1999, p. 285).

Conclusion

In Aristotle’s political philosophy, we find the seeds of thinking about democracy as a space for the realization of human nature. Although Aristotle himself did not glorify Athenian democracy in its extreme form, his reflections on the *polis*, human nature, and ethics suggest that the political community *politeia* constitutes a privileged space in which a person has the opportunity to actualize their essence and nature; a space in which the potential with which the human being enters the world can be fulfilled. For Aristotle, the authenticity of existence lies in the harmony between who a person is by nature as an individual and who they become as a member of the political community: “man is by nature a political animal; and he who is without a city-state, not by accident but by nature, is either a beast or a god” (Aristotle, 2006, p. 27). Although Aristotle’s classification of political regimes leaves no doubt about the value of democracy, which he regards not so much as a flawed system but as a degenerate form of rule by the people - subordinating the common good to the private interests of the rulers - it nevertheless does not completely reject democratic solutions and institutions that allow citizens to participate in governance, especially in deliberative and judicial dimensions. This participatory understanding of the political community indicates that man, as *zoon politikon*, is by nature a social and political being for whom life within a community is a condition for the full realization of his own potential, the constitution of his own “self” of being in the world. It is the space in which he can actualize his nature as a rational, moral, and social being. This space thus becomes a condition for the intellectual and moral development of man and is not subject to arbitrary decision but is a natural need arising from the essence of man; through it, our human nature has the chance to manifest itself. The task of the political community thus focuses on creating such conditions in which the natural, innate potentials of human beings to do good - actions of the soul aligned with excellence and virtue - have the chance to be realized, allowing civic virtues to fully develop. Thus, the community creates the possibility of achieving the fullness of human being’s humanity, carrying the promise of its autonomy, while outside the community there arises the risk of instrumentalization. The political community that most fosters citizen participation and their moral improvement approaches the ideal in which the Aristotelian vision or intuition resonates that the goal of the state is the good life, not merely life itself. The political community thus becomes the condition enabling the transition from potentiality to actuality - from the mere possibility of being a rational being to a real life in accordance with reason. The self-sufficiency

of the individual is therefore an illusion; a person cannot achieve their full *telos* in isolation. Ultimately, for Aristotle, the political community is that which enables a person to attain *eudaimonia*, happiness understood as the fulfillment of human potential, as the achievement of the fullness of life proper to the rational nature of man. Democracy, if truly internalized in political culture, leads to the universalization of the conditions for a dignified life. It abolishes arbitrary differences in access to means of self-realization, establishing a normative space of equality of opportunity, freedom of expression, participation, and development. Universalism does not mean uniformity, but rather the recognition that conditions such as freedom, security, participation, and recognition belong to and are essential for every person regardless of their social position. In this sense, democracy creates a framework in which existential authenticity ceases to be a privilege of the elite and becomes a universal human right (Sartori, 1998). Subjectivity in this dimension means one more thing: the individual as an agent, endowed with inalienable dignity and freedom, organizes the space of the community, in the sense that he or she becomes its owner, "possesses the state" in the axiological and political sense, is no longer a passive element of the political structure, an element reduced to a tool owned by the state, but exists according to the Kantian concept of the person as an "end in itself" (Kant, 2018). The state, in turn, loses its status as sovereign and ceases to be the 'owner of man'; it no longer subordinates the individual or elevates itself above them. It is the individual who is the source of the legitimacy of power, and sovereignty belongs to the citizens. The state no longer transcends the individual nor gains ontological superiority over them, but is a real form of protection of their rights and a guarantor of development (Bobbio, 1998). The state is therefore not the source of rights, their creator, but recognizes, guarantees and protects these rights, i.e. it provides conditions for the full realization of these rights through institutions of the rule of law, mechanisms of control over power and civic participation (Huntington, 1995). This fundamental assumption, essential for the functioning of the modern democratic state, is, in fact, revolutionary from a historical perspective, because it constitutes man as an abstract value, rising above his own physicality, above a structure reduced to a natural object. That is why European democratic culture presents itself as a continuous civilizational experiment, the essence of which is uncertainty and openness to change. It is precisely in this continuous dynamic that its strength and fragility reside.

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