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Beyond dreaming of democracy...

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In France, we use to say that when a word is heard everywhere, it means that what it represents has disappeared. Yet we have never heard so much the word "democracy" than during the last decade. Does it mean that the concept behind the word is disappearing?

The task of a futurist is to discriminate between a fad or a fashion and a real problem with long-term effect. Then he has to understand this problem and its related consequences, in order to help the decision-maker to take the best possible decision in order to change the probable future. Thinking the future of democracy is such a challenge today. In this beginning of the XXI century, what is democracy? What does it mean really, beyond the word itself and the perhaps obsolete way we have to consider it? What are the possible consequences for the future of what we describe with this word?

1. From a dream of equity to a world-spread model

1.1. from Antiquity to the modern world

Let's go back to the far past to remember the original meaning of democracy.

The word itself has been derived from *demokratia*, the root meanings of which are *demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule). Thus it refers to a form of government in which the people rules.

1.1.1. The Athenian model

The oldest records having succeeded to reach us describe the city-state of Athens as the first government based on democracy. This great historical innovation was supported by four pillars: political equality (*isonomia*) among the "people" (we will see later the ambiguity of this word), liberty, respect for the law, and justice¹.

However this model was far enough of what we consider now as a democracy, especially from two points of view that still have a major importance nowadays. The first angle is the definition of *demos*. *Demos* was a protean word with the multiple significances, inter alia "the people in his unit" (or to be more precise, the body of the citizens) and the "small people" (lower classes). Theoretical debates of Antiquity played many times of this fundamental ambiguity [FINLEY, 1976]. In fact, the Athenian democracy was organized around the citizens, but it excluded the women, as well as the slaves and the foreigners (called "wogs" i.e. "those which live with"), that is to say they were no more than 10% of the population of the Attic. Even later (509 BC), when the Roman Republic was founded, the sovereign capacity was allotted to the People i.e., in fact, to the patricians, the noble families, and women as well as plebeians were still excluded.

The second angle of the Antiquity model revolves around *kratein*, meaning "to rule". If today we understand "rule by the people" as usually "rule by elected/nominated representatives of the people", this was not the case in the beginning. The Athenian democracy is a direct or participatory democracy. This means that the citizens all were members of the Parliament (*Ecclesia*) which held the main part of the capacities, made all the decisions and named the magistrates in charge of the executive functions which returned accounts to it. Although a quarter only of the citizens was really implied in the political life of the City, each one was likely to be drawn with the fate to sit at the court or to become magistrate. Consequently, one can speak indeed about a direct democracy insofar as each one, at least once in its life, was to form part of the system and could not thus claim to be unaware of how it functioned.

Whatever the way in which one considers the Athenian democracy, in good like THUCYDIDE or evil like PLATO or ARISTOTLE, force is to recognize the turn of force which represented the shaping then the operating of this system during two centuries. But force is also to recognize that unless turning over to the size of the City-States, modern State-Nations (besides those which are populated little as the Swiss Cantons for example) have little in common with the Athenian democracy.

¹ MOSSE Claude, *Histoire D'une Démocratie. Athenes : Des Origines A La Conquête Macédonienne*. Paris : Seuil, 1971

From this quick glance, we can easily observe that this conception of democracy has indeed much evolved during the next millennia.

1.1.2. Next step

Three main aspects of this evolution are significant enough to have banned forever the possibility to implement once again a new Athenian democracy.

The first change is the widening of the concept of people. Through the centuries was held a long fight to obtain the political rights. It started with the plebeian ones which obtained finally, after two centuries, same rights as the patricians, in 300 A.D. (from where the term of 'plebiscite'). The *Magna Carta* in 1297, the Edict of Nantes in 1598, the *Habeas Corpus Act* in 1679, the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the Declaration of the Human and Civic Rights in 1789, the Charter of the United Nations in 1945, the voting rights granted to the women... are only some of the great stages of this walk of Western civilization towards the achievement of the ideal of democracy. This walk is far from being completed: the voting rights for example are not granted to foreigners in all the countries. Yet evolution toward the inclusion of each human being within the concept of *demos* is still on the march...

The second change is the creation of the modern State. In Athens, society and state are merged in a "political society". The Athenian city-state and the Republican Rome both had elements of a high popular participation in governmental affairs and little, if any, centralized bureaucratic control. When the idea of democracy reemerges in the European political thought, at the end of the sixteenth century, MACHIAVELLI has already operated a decisive watershed in the modern political thought: he separated the political power from theology, he laicized it². Consequently, the construction of the modern State —as support of the power exerted by the Prince— became possible and will be developed, précised and enriched by major political thinkers such as BODIN, HOBBS, MONTESQUIEU and TOQUEVILLE³.

The cross-fertilization between the widening of the *demos* and the construction of the *kratein* produced in the nineteenth century the third change: the idea of nation. This concept takes the place for those of "people", the former *demos*. This is an abstract entity, independent of social and economic contingencies. As sovereign, the nation can express itself only through representatives⁴. This is the end of ROUSSEAU's model of democracy, where every individual owns a part of sovereignty that he can't delegate to anyone else⁵; and the end of the Athenian model as well. Thus nation becomes the basis of a new concept: the Nation-State, the most complex form of human organization yet attained⁶. Folk- or language-based, sometimes religion-based, they are geographical entities with borders, sovereignty and legitimacy, supported by a bureaucracy (incarnation of the State) independent of the chief (the Prince), which is himself the representative of the *demos*. In less than one century, this institution has become the dominant form of nationhood today, mainly due to the increasingly penetration of

² Niccolo MACHIAVELLI, *Il Principe*, 1513.

³ Jean BODIN, *Six livres de la République* [Six Books of the Republic], 1576 ; Thomas HOBBS, *Leviathan*, 1651 ; Charles de MONTESQUIEU *De l'esprit des lois* [The spirit of the laws], 1748 ; Alexis de TOCQUEVILLE, *De la démocratie en Amérique* [Democracy in America], 1835

⁴ Emmanuel-Joseph SIÉYÈS, *Qu'est ce que le Tiers-Etat ?* [What is the Third Estate?], 1789

⁵ Jean-Jacques ROUSSEAU, *Le Contrat Social* [Social Contract], 1762

⁶ Johann-Gottlieb FICHTE, *Discours à la nation allemande*, 1807 ; Ernest RENAN, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation ?*, 1882

the State into the daily life of its citizens and the growing sophistication in its organization of internal resources⁷.

It does not mean that the Nation-State concept has resolved the main difficulty of democracy that political theorists, such as Thomas HOBBS and those who followed him on this path, pointed out. On one hand, State must have a monopoly of coercive power in order to provide a secure basis to the citizens and their activities; on the other hand this regulatory and coercive capability could deprive citizens of political and social freedoms. Since the sixteenth century, the political thought was focused on this fragility and the search for the best system of government to compensate for it (sovereignty of the people, separation of the powers, constitution, balance between might and right, power and law, duties and rights, authority and liberty). In the early beginning of the nineteenth century, liberal democrats provided the key institutional innovation to try to overcome this problem: representative democracy. Thus citizen can choose, authorize and control political decisions, according to a "social contract" where the delegation is entire. To complete this model, equality between citizens had to be recognised and a universal suffrage achieved. Slowly, this model became the norm, during the twentieth century, in most of the Western countries and beyond.

1.2. An overwhelming flow

Considering that the great majority of political thinkers from Ancient Greece to present days have been highly critical of the theory and the practice of democracy⁸, how to understand the current uniform commitment to democracy?

Two main reasons appeared, embedded in the history of the nineteenth century, and then developed during the twentieth.

1.2.1. An idea of the human progress

During the first half of the nineteenth century, rooted in the French Revolution ideals (1789), ideas of republic as a mix of freedom and equality and solidarity were very strong. They nurtured movements such as philosophy of progress, utopian socialism, humanism, romanticism, Saint-Simonism, and Utopians; they contributed to the French Revolution of 1848 that created the male universal suffrage (at the opposite to the American poll taxes system). In this inspired environment, inherited from the Age of Enlightenment and under the influence of a mythified⁹ vision of Antiquity, the four pillars of democracy (freedom, equality, supremacy of the law and justice) could appear as the perfect political process for the budding Republic or parliamentary regimes.

However, beyond this dream, another strong component of the political power was being developed: the Bourgeoisie. In France for example, the middle-class identity, while far from being fixed in 1830, was partly built by the press (it was the beginning of the newspaper industry) like a universal category, heiress of 1789 and who only represented the general

⁷ Bertrand de JOUVENEL, *Du pouvoir* [On Power: Its Nature and the History of Its Growth], 1949.

⁸ KRIEGER Joel (ed), *Oxford Companion to Politics of the World*, Oxford University Press, 2001

⁹ a vision transforming the reality in myth, obscuring the negative aspects and idealizing the positive ones.

interests of the society.¹⁰ This point of view, confronted with the speeches of politicians, including republicans, even socialists, was so largely carried, in 1848, that any other opinion seems indicating a tendency antirepublican. All politicians of the moment, whatever their ideological attachment, were persuaded and sought to convince their contemporaries, that the middle-class "had as a task to guide the people" as expressed it better than anybody Prosper ENFANTIN in 1848¹¹: "For whoever does not stick to appearances, the universal suffrage, far from limiting the influence of the middle-class, extends and strengthens it on the contrary. The experiment of the Enlightenment, practical knowledge of the middle-class will ensure it for a long time preponderance [...]. To tighten the hand with the proletariat, to ensure his/her children education, and himself a job [...], he to facilitate the access to the property, he to ensure the moralizing joys of the family [...]. What is indeed the French middle-class? It is the people having reached comfort, with education, with safety. And these conditions of ease and wellbeing, without which freedom is a meaningless word and a cruel derision, here are what the people aspires in his turn, and what under no circumstances would it obtain, without the assistance of the middle-class, assistance which the middle-class cannot refuse without opening of the abysses where civilization itself is lost and absorbed."

With such a political role to play, the middle-class transforms itself into the Greek demos, as a very restrictive political body far from the *laos*, the shapeless mass; it can even be compared to the *Populus* (the educated and rich patricians) Roman Republic. This is the birth of new elite, strengthened by the development of education and capitalism. During this second half of the nineteenth century, some political thinkers suddenly realised that this middle-class would rather be a 'glass ceiling' than a social lift for the low classes, especially the proletarians whose the conditions of life were worsening. MARX, ENGELS, and later the Marxists tradition more broadly, envisaged then the replacement of the liberal democracy now associated with the capitalist economy, by the complete democratisation of the society and the state that could be embodied in a pyramid structure of direct democracy. Such a democratisation means necessarily that human as well as political emancipation can only be attained by the suppression of the State. However the various experiences of socialist democracies until the end of the twentieth century have shown as a result not the extinction of the State but, at the opposite, its strengthening until totalitarianism. By the way, isn't the current liberal democracy named "soft tyranny" nowadays?

So, whatever promoted by what will become the Left (social democracy) and the Right (liberal democracy), democracy is become the best model of reference at the end of the nineteenth century. In both conceptions of the antagonist parties, democracy must lead to the emancipation of the human being, through education and citizenship (civic responsibility), and to the universally recognized equality of all in terms of justice and freedom. If the Athenian model is definitely over, the four pillars that have supported its development are still —and more than ever— the basis of the most desirable vision of the future of (Western) humanity.

1.2.2. The fear of totalitarianism

The unfolding of the twentieth century confirmed the evidence: in the democratic regime, the main problem was the power of the State, even as legitimate representative of the Nation.

¹⁰ Jeremy D. POPKIN, *Press, Revolution and Social Identities in France 1830-1835*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002.

¹¹ Prosper ENFANTIN, *Le Crédit*, 1848 (quoted by Michèle RIOT-SARCEY, "Comment relire le XIX^e siècle ?", in *Revue d'Histoire du XIX^e siècle*, 2005-31)

The First World War entailed the awareness that a democratic government was not a prevention to war. The last war in Europe (excepting the colonization wars) had been between France (then the Third Empire) and Germany (a Monarchy) in 1860. In 1914, France is a Republic where the Prime Minister is the real Chief of the Government; England a Parliamentary Monarchy where the power of the King is rather weak; Germany a Parliamentary Monarchy where the power of the Kaiser is much stronger than the Parliament; Russia is also a kind of a Parliamentary Monarchy but the Tsar is in the same situation than the Kaiser, the Douma being too weak; Italy is also a Parliamentary Monarchy where the power of the King is weaker than his Prime Minister.

With nine millions of deaths, and the huge change in the art of war that this World War introduced, some scepticism begins to appear then about the democratic system. Left and Right parties exacerbate their position between the two Wars: social tensions occur everywhere in Europe, amplified by the economic crisis of 1929. However the march on a better democracy still goes on: more and more social rights are given to the people. For some, the development of the Soviet Union is also a promise of hope for a better world.

Then, history is well-known: if MUSSOLINI gets the power by a coup d'état, HITLER accesses to it though regular elections, in a very democratic way. After the Second World War, all of a sudden, totalitarianism is discovered (while the word appeared in 1932 defined by MUSSOLINI) in the fascist regimes of the Right as well as in the communist regimes of the Left. The rough number of deaths imputed to these regimes (as well in Asian as in the Western countries) is almost fifty millions of people. Hiroshima and Nagasaki are forever scars in the collective mind of the Western civilisation.

Political thinkers and philosophers need then to better understand totalitarianism and its relationship with democracy. FRIEDRICH, in the 50's, then ARON succeed to demonstrate that monopolistic and one-party regimes are just the opposite of pluralist and constitutional regimes: they have nothing to do with the liberal State and would rather be an accident in history¹². ARENDT is less indulgent¹³ and shows accurately how totalitarianism succeeded in erasing the moral principles supposed ruling the democratic societies. War criminals acted as if they were deprived of any personal capability of reflection and free will. She tries to justify this by the concept of "system": totalitarianism works because it functions like a system as does the mass society itself which, the first, has given people the feeling of uselessness and rootlessness since the very beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Doing so, ARENDT deeply links democracy and totalitarianism.

From now on, democracy is besmirched by suspicion. In the best case, liberal democracy has failed to protect the society against the arbitrary power; in the worst case, there is something rotten in the modern society itself, either because of the industrial model of mass consumption according to ARENDT or because of the very nature of the human being itself; and democracy can't change it, liberal or not.

In conclusion, this brief twentieth century —begun in Europe in 1914 and finishing in 1989— brought a twofold disenchantment: the State, even bounded by the representative democracy, is not the ideal mechanism for democracy it was supposed to be; and the human being himself, even after three millennia of civilisation, is not so civilised than the Enlightenment asserted it. Beyond this, humanism has probably been the great loser of the post-war era. With it, the idea of the future as a place of progress to reach just disappears. This huge shift

¹² Carl J. FRIEDRICH,...; Raymond ARON, *Démocratie et totalitarisme* [Democracy and Totalitarianism], 1965: ; see also Alexandre SOLJENITSYNE or Elie WIESEL.

¹³ Hannah ARENDT, *Les origines du totalitarisme* [], 1951

leads to pre-eminence of 'short-termism', the search for immediate reward, hedonism, and a kind of laziness or lack of thought in sowing the seeds for the future...

2. Democracy on the threshold of the twenty-first century

1789 is still a meaningful date for a lot of countries and people aspiring to freedom. It is very likely that 1989, in the next century, will express the same symbol and inspire the same quest for freedom. With both dates, we changed of century, not as a set of one hundred years, but as a new step in our evolution. Yet we are so close in time to 1989 that it is difficult to discriminate between the structural threads of the fabric and events of little importance for the future. However, we can observe a significant evolution of the inner components of democracy: *demos* and *kratein*, Nation and State. Their situation, in the 90s, has changes — and is still changing— probably more deeply than it has been be first analysed by the observers.

2.1. Empowerment of *Demos* and *Kratein*

Demos and *kratos* (the power, from *kratein*) are continuing their interlocked mutation, which is characterized in this beginning of the twenty-first century by their empowerment. *Demos*, as the one entitled to possess and delegate the power to rule (*kratos*), is strongly challenging its traditional representatives.

2.1.1. The transformation of the civil society

The *demos* is still in a process of including more and more categories of people. However, until then, this enlargement is less an empowerment of the human being than of the civil society. Let's define here the civil society with Sue ROEBUCK's extensive and modern definition: "*Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy group.*"¹⁴.

This social abstract body has known different evolutions according to the countries. For example, in the United States of America, it was strong very early, structuring deeply the political and institutional landscape. In France, at the opposite, after the French Revolution (1789) the former civil society was destroyed (corporations, guilds, etc.), as inherited of the monarchism and its inequalities; so its rebuilding needed several decades during which the Bourgeoisie was the main, if not the only, representative of the people as a multitude

¹⁴ Sue ROEBUCK, *What is civil society?*, Centre for Civil Society, The London School of Economics and Political Science, quoted on http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm ; see also Thomas HOBBS, *De Cive* (1647, 2nd publication increased). Jean-Louis QUERMONNE. *Les régimes politiques occidentaux*, Paris: Seuil, 1986, p. 187.; Jose HARRIS (ed.), *Civil Society in British History. Ideas, Identities, Institutions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003

(according to HOBBS's definition¹⁵). This middle class was a reference in terms not only of material and immaterial (education) wealth but also in terms of morale: the Bourgeoisie was in charge of the redistribution of this general wealth and implicitly shared with the State the responsibility of the lower class's progress¹⁶. It was both a religious (in the Christian culture¹⁷) and a laic (Republican ideals) commitment.

Then, during the twentieth century and whatever the country, democracy (liberal as well socialist) was expressed through the political parties. Taking over the role of the Bourgeoisie as drivers of the lower classes, they were made possible by the development of the middle classes from which their leaders came in most of the case. Soon they became the main political actors, doing and undoing governments, definitively linked to them. But this situation has broken one of the most important rules of democracy: the separation of state from the civil society. While political parties were not the only representative of the civil society, they have taken such a large role on the political stage that they have almost obliterated the other representatives of the *demos*, especially where they were strongly linked to trade unions.

Consequently, after the fall of the Berlin Wall —a milestone indicating a rupture between the world of the twentieth century and the following often described as a time of transition— and as a consequence of the disenchantment, a kind of depoliticization was neatly observed¹⁸. Like many of the drivers converging in the 90s to form this particular situation (often named post-modernism or post-industrial era), this weakening of the politics began earlier, but it really became part of the global landscape during the last decade. In Europe, in particular, it expresses itself not only by a lesser interest for politics (weak adhesion to unions or parties, weak participation to elections) but also, in one hand, by the excessive privatisation of the individual life (under all its aspects) and everybody's withdrawal on its own reserved area or interests and, in the other hand, by the inability of those old parties to think differently and find new solutions. Perhaps one of the causes lays in the disappearance of the moral responsibility of the higher classes toward the lowers: political parties are now the only ones entitled to drive and be in charge of the solidarity and responsibility regarding the class they are supposed to represent.

2.1.2. The empowerment of individuals: a return to the "multitude"?

In this context, in the beginning of the 90s, the old Greek ambiguity about *demos* has come back. Individuals, as a multitude, reappear on the political stage beside civil society. What the Fall of the Berlin Wall has shown is the real power of these individuals and not of the civil society. A little bit earlier, in the spring of 1989, the same demonstration had been done, as a

¹⁵ In its work *De Cive*, HOBBS (1588-1679) specifies the difference between the people and what he names the "multitude". According to him, the "multitude which is controlled" is only one agglomeration of individuals without coherence nor unit. The people are on the other hand "the multitude which controls", i.e. the association of the individuals who, constituted, becomes a single civic person. The people thus designed are able to act in a determined direction, when the "multitude" is to some extent marked by the juxtaposition of particular feelings and, consequently, in impossibility of being determined. Although HOBBS is certainly not a thinker of the democracy, he is those which, first, conceive the idea of a legal bond between the people and sovereignty when it affirms: "it is the people which reign, to some extent of State that it is".

¹⁶ It was particularly the case in France during the last third of the nineteenth century with the generalisation of education and the spread of scientific writings and exhibitions for the general public.

¹⁷ we can find the same social responsibility in the Muslim religion and probably others too.

¹⁸ Jacques RANCIERE, *Aux bords du politique* [On the verge of politics], Paris: Essais Folio, Gallimard, 1998, 262 pages ; Gabriel MAISSIN, "La philosophie de l'émancipation cher Jacques RANCIERE" [Philosophy of emancipation in the work of Jacques RANCIERE], in *Politique*, juin 2004.

premise, in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Thus individuals have acquired a stronger influence than ever on the political stage. Indeed the observed depoliticization is not the right interpretation: reality is much more revolutionary. The emergence of individuals is broken down the old and now obsolete system of representation. Individuals are no longer interested in the traditional political parties such as they occur today: fossilized around old cleavages (Left/Right, Liberal/Conservative, etc.) that offer no solutions adapted to the complex and global problems the world is facing. And, particularly, no solution in terms of meaning. Hence, sometimes, the success of specific parties such as extreme-right that offers one basic solution to the complex problem of security, unemployment, impoverishment as a situation of all the fears; or the Green party that is the only one to pretend taking seriously the problems of climate change and sustainable development. But these who still join these organisations are no longer the majority. What can be considered as an obsolete form of representation is just very slowly dying.

However, as Mother Nature hates vacuum, another part of civil society is developing itself at a fast pace, more adapted to the current aspirations: associations and NGOs. They function on another model, different from the political parties: not hierarchical but around a project, not top-down but bottom-up. They are also more transparent, based on accountability and empowerment. Benefiting from the changes on the international stage due to the collapse of the USSR, multiple NGOs have reached the global level to set up their power of influence¹⁹. Doing so, they seem to be reaching —much better than any political party— the twofold goal assigned to the civil society: protect the citizen from the State and express a "volonté générale" (general will) that has the power to undo what the State has done²⁰.

This empowerment of the individuals has entailed a change in the relationship with the State. Until now, the State's interlocutor, beyond the civil society, was the citizen. But citizenship is now considered as a too restrictive criterion, in a world where aspiration to equity is essential. Youth, resident foreigners are also part —as individuals— of this relationship, although in some countries they are not considered as citizens. Citizenship is no longer considered as a duty but as a right; and, according to the principle of equality, this right must belong to any human being, as a "human right".

Yet the political institutions have not evolved as quickly to face this new situation. The huge majority of the democratic regimes are still representative. Considering both the distrust toward the traditional representatives (old civil society as well as politicians) and the switch from citizen to individual, a call for direct democracy is expressing itself in a lot of democratic countries, particularly at the local level but also at the world level through public manifestations of what could be called, one day, a world public opinion²¹.

Thus the *kratos* (from *kratein* meaning "to rule") is also evolving: at the local level, various modalities are being implemented in order to associate population (as the whole of the individuals) to the public decision-making. Territorial foresight (especially the French "territorial prospective") occurs as one of the best tools to do so. Either organised by the State or the local authorities like in France where it is the most broadly spread and regularly used²²,

¹⁹ see Peter WILLETTS, *"The Consicence of the World": The Influence of Non-Governmental Organisations in the U.N. System*, 1996

²⁰ cf. Thomas HOBBS, Charles de MONTESQUIEU and Jacques RANCIERE about this topic.

²¹ as it was seen about the Iraq war.

²² GOUX-BAUDIMENT Fabienne, « La prospective territoriale dans le monde : perspectives pour la décision publique » [Territorial foresight in the world: consequences for public decision-making], rapport pour la DATAR, non publié, 2001, 62 pages ; WATES Nick, *The Community Planning Handook*, London: Earthscan, 2000, 230 pages

or organised by NGOs like ENDA in Africa for example, it is a new way to strengthen individuals' empowerment and their futures-oriented responsibility. At this local level, from community to city, it looks like —under the cover of subsidiarity and with a new form— a coming back of the Greek City-State based on direct democracy.

2.2. Changing State and Nation

The modern theory of liberal democracy is based on the existence of a Nation-State, as an updated version of the pair *demos* and *kratein*. However, the recent trends are showing a possible dismantlement of this duo, being in jeopardy by both communities and globalisation.

2.2.1. A possible return to a medieval way of ruling?

The ongoing transformation of the power over millennia has led to the current constitution of the State as the supreme power over individuals. In the current Western democracies, the State of law is the abstract place of the permanent political power that is the organising force of a society. It is characterised by three features: a set of institutions which possess the means of legitimate violence and coercion; the control of a geographically bounded territory, usually referred to as a society; the monopoly of the rule-making over its territory. Moreover, to be democratic (from the liberal point of view), this State must obey three principles: an impersonal structure of public power; a constitution to help guarantee and protect individual rights and the pillars of democracy (equality, laws, justice and freedom); and mechanisms to promote competition and debate among alternative political platforms. Must be added to this collection the liberal notion according to which the State must be separated from the civil society.²³

However this description is theoretical and TOCQUEVILLE has already warned about its possible drifts, mainly soft tyranny (the "majority tyranny": political correctness, consensus; administrative despotism, etc.) and individualism. Indeed, the core of the subject here is the direct relationship between the individual (as a mere human being) and the State. According to ROUSSEAU's Social Contract, every individual freely accepts the domination of the State as a counterpart of the protection he gets from it, protection against "natural law" (the law of the strongest) and injustice²⁴. Hence two major consequences. In one hand, it is the source of the progressive State irruption in all the domains of life to protect individuals from everything: diseases, accidents, unemployment, education costs (esp. in Europe), sects, natural disasters and whatsoever. Almost every act —when interacting with others— in daily life is ruled by some kind of law (legal or moral law), sometimes so deeply embedded in minds that one is no longer aware of it. From the Welfare State to HUXLEY's *Big Brother* there can be a very little step. In the other hand, a strong feeling was born during the twentieth century that the State was actually unable to prevent harm against the people either in democratic regimes (i.e. from bad policies or governments) or in the totalitarian ones (Nazism, Fascism, Communism). This feeling has been reinforced by the new world trade order brought up by globalisation from the 90s on.

This double perception of both "too much State" (invasive State) and "not efficient enough State" (failing State) has driven to several different positions. One is to reject the entire State as no longer pertinent; that is the position of a lot of young people, hence the supposed depoliticization and some sort of longing for anarchy. A second one is to say: "this is not too

²³ see, in *The Oxford Companion*, op. cit., John H. HALL, "State" and David HELD, "Democracy".

²⁴ WORMS Frederic, "La Justice", in *Philosophie Magazine*, n°1, April-May 2006, pp. 72-73

much but this must be more efficient"; this is usually the position, in Europe, of the Left parties in order to improve the social protection and of the Right parties to reinforce the State authority. A third position consists in limiting the role of the State to the democratic pillars, being considered as a source of dysfunction when interacting with other domains (such as the free market); this is the traditional liberal position.²⁵

Taking position means knowing perfectly the very nature of the problem. However, is such incriminated State the real problem? As a constitutional and parliamentary State, its structures are not at issue; equality, laws, justice (through the separation of the powers) and freedom are always its prime foundations, at least in Europe; and mechanisms to protect them are still functioning. In a provocative way, one could say that only the human part of it is the defect: the Enlightenment are too far away. They have faded with the harshness of the twentieth century, with the growing disenchantment, with the fear of the future, with the material comfort of the daily life. Let's remember TOCQUEVILLE's second warning, about individualism: "Individualism is a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself. [...] Individualism at first only dams the spring of public virtues, but in the long run it attacks and destroys all the others too and finally merges in egoism."²⁶ This individualism is not only those of the people but, as of the whole society, the individualism of the rulers, including administration, governments and parliaments. As representatives both of the State and of the people, they are the core —and the Gordian knot— of the democratic system. That they, as persons, lie to the people or be corrupted for example is not the point as far as they properly fill their duties; they are human beings and, as such, not perfect. But most of them are suffering from the worst disease: they have lost the sense of reality. Prisoner of a new kind of aristocracy —their advisers who can channel and bias information and the few representative jet-set in which they move—, sized in a maelstrom of activities letting too few time for personal thinking, entirely submitted to the soft tyranny that shapes the political correctness, they have quite simply lost the reins of the capacity. This leads them to rule no longer for the people but against the people, to protect it no longer from the others but from itself, to give it no longer freedom (human development) but slavery (through the lack of critical mind). Such rulers benefit from two hyper-efficient tools: an untouchable and highly indifferent administration and the sadly poor quality of mass-media. Administration breaks people's energy, in thoughtless applying obsolete or irrelevant rules, or having no consideration for the demands of the real life (e.g. through the practice of undue times of payment). And mass-media build, unbuild and rebuild governments as well as our perception of reality.

Step by step, the old, long-forgotten, Middle-Age way of ruling comes back, almost imperceptible: media tyranny has replaced the theocratic authorities; the unquestioned credulity of the multitude has replaced the faith (the "magister dixit" being replaced by "it was written in the newspapers"); lobbying interests have taken the place of corporatist interests (e.g. about education, energy, climate change). Even the notion of "public interest" (or common good) seems to be disappearing. A second-rate citizen appears, very alike the serfs: this is the huge silent majority, bent under the harness of a highly competitive work while the active minority imposes itself. To say nothing of the current crisis of State justice where the separation of the legal power is either too effective (leading to a "Republic of Judges") or no longer effective at all, justice being then corrupted by governments.

2.2.2. Where is the Nation?

²⁵ Francis FUKUYAMA, "The limits of liberal democracy", in *Oxford Companion*, op.cit.

²⁶ Alexis de TOCQUEVILLE, *Democracy in America*, Paris: éd. MAYER, p. 506

Nation, the State's base, is undergoing a very different change, being reformulated both at the local and international levels.

A nation can be defined as a "national community of fate, a community that rightly governs itself and determine its own future"²⁷. But several drivers, such global interconnectedness — mediated by modern communication systems and information technology— communitarianism and globalization, as well as the various trends evocated above, are challenging this national level of concern.

The movement of "communities" appears in Europe in the 90s, coming from the United States. They were a set of people linked either by common local interests, such as local community life, through a link of physical proximity, or by whatever common interest through Internet and organised in network. As micro "communities of fate" they have developed futures-oriented processes of self-determination and, sometimes, some innovative alternative processes of exchange²⁸. Following this movement at the local scale, local authorities (at the level of cities, areas or other territorial divisions) quickly appropriated this way of shaping and building their own future, hence the worldwide spreading of territorial foresight in the late 90s. This local self-determination is a serious challenge to the nation as a "national community". Since the general interest is supposed emanate directly from the nation, how can this be possible without entering in conflict with those "local interest"²⁹? Among some drifts of this communitarian approach are the "closed cities" (only opened to their residents) which are spreading in several countries and the desire for secession of some small unviable territories under ethnic communities pressures. But these drifts can be of no weight against the supporters of this movement, such as communitarianism — as an answer to the excessive individualism³⁰— and weakening of central States and the corollary devolution of competences to local authorities (subsidiarity).

Nation is also challenged by globalisation and the related interdependence. Between devolution to local authorities and a less explicit but as much restrictive devolution to regional (e.g. European Commission) and global (WTO, UNO) authorities, Nation-States have entered a slow but real process of weakening. They probably are no longer the most efficient place to govern in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. The European expressed need for new transnational collaborative institutions with greater transparency and democracy, more empowerment of the European citizen and better accountability, is only one of the signals pointing toward the way to new forms of government at the regional and global level. To support this future authority, a new kind of nation must be thought about in order to meet the citizens' need to be active and responsive part not only of their own communities but also of the regions in which they live, and of the planet itself as concerned by global phenomena. Already the forming of a world public opinion is a contribution to this process, as well as the progressive disappearance of territorial borders, the G8 sketch of a world government and the diffusion of "governance" below, above and alongside the nation-state³¹.

²⁷ David HELD, "Democracy", in *Oxford Companion*, opus cit. p.220

²⁸ Juremir Machado da Silva, Porto Alegre : la mairie du XXIème siècle ; SEL

²⁹ In France, the notion of "regional interest" has already been very officially claimed in the 2000s.

³⁰ "Communitarian concepts have been gaining a following in response to excessive individualism in the West and a retreating from collectivism and authoritarianism in other parts of the world. They also serve as an antidote to religious fundamentalism." Amitai ETZIONI, "Communitarianism", in *Oxford Companion*, op. cit. p.158

³¹ see David HELD, idem

Last but not least, nation is suffering from the disappearance of one of its inner constitutive elements: the determination of the future. Excepted some very rare cases, such as the Finish Parliamentary Committee for the Future, rulers (governments and parliaments) have long ago given up the idea to think their future in a comprehensive, responsible and normative way. Pre-eminence of "short-termism", that seems to be closely associated to individualism and hedonism, can be observed everywhere. Foresight, which is more than forecasting in the way that it embeds a choice of the desirable future to be built, is practiced by local authorities more than by governments. Few plans for the future of a society as a whole are done at the national level³². Sectoral and partial approaches are still in force although the very nature of the problems we are currently facing needs global, comprehensive and complex treatments. Various reasons can justify this lack of taking the future into account: lack of competences (as ability to encompass the possible futures) or of courage (to make the right choices and carry them on), culture of emergency (no time to deal with something else than short-term issues), lack of the sense of the common good (only focused on personal or clan interests). But when a Nation has no longer the choice of its own future, is it still a Nation?

And when the Nation disappears, can the State alone be the guarantor of the democracy? Probably not. In leaving its capability to determine its own future to supra- and infra-authorities, the State abandons the major part of its essence and becomes just a manager of the state affairs. The evolution toward a new form of federalism, where regions, provinces and metropolitan cities are on the same level than the State, as it occurs in the article 114 of the new Italian Constitution (2001), is already a step ahead in this direction. In this case, democracy will come out in these territorial levels. And beyond the State, erasing its borders, new nations could appear and be extended to entire civilizations. Either through the capability to link and mobilize the diasporas as HUNGTINTON pointed out³³, or by the feeling the new generations could work out that they belong to their area and, in the same time, to a far much extended group sharing the same values and history, such as the Western or the Asian civilizations.

On the threshold of the twenty-first century, two strong trends are manifesting themselves: the empowerment of individuals and the weakening of the nation-state as the best representative of a democratic regime. As a way perhaps to escape the State-octopus and the old institutions that are linked to, individuals have built new clans, bringing them together whatever the geographic scale (from the smallest area to the world diasporas) and giving them more power (through NGOs) and the feeling of more freedom.

Will democracy survive this new deal?

3. Dreams beyond democracy?

The twenty-first century really began in 1989, with the Fall of the Berlin Wall. This event has led to more than a new geopolitical order —the end of the 40-years-old opposition between East and West and the Yalta partition of the world. It opened the door to a soft revolution centred no longer on economic and technologic progress as in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but on the human development. This does not mean only poverty, health,

³² see the UK National Foresight: <http://www.foresight.gov.uk/>

³³ Samuel HUNGTINTON, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, 1996

education... as included in the UN human development indicator, but also, and perhaps above all, the philosophical question of why are we on Earth. The current fight between Darwinists and Creationists, the quick and broad spreading of the notion of sustainable development are both ways to deepen or answer fundamental questions: who are we and where are we going? Extinction of humanity is no longer an unthinkable topic; so as the idea of a new physical evolution of the human being toward a mix of humanity and machine or towards an "improved man" thanks to the genetic manipulation. The human being appears nowadays as a new object of exploration: genomics, brain sciences and many other fields of knowledge are focused on the human being as a new Frontier, a new field to discover. Mankind has to face new challenges such as ageing, new pandemics, psychological diseases (or source of diseases). From pacemakers to bionic prosthesis and to exoskeletons tomorrow, interfaces between man and machine are increasing: will we stay then, in our mind, the same human being than our ancestors were?³⁴

In this very new context, and considering the past, where are we heading with democracy in this new world?

3.1. Human development: Aliens ahead

Alienity is not so distant from us: there is no need to think about extraterrestrial aliens or our post-human descendants in a far future. The first aliens we will meet are much likely our own children. From all over the world rises the acknowledgement that the new generations are very different from the previous ones. Perhaps every generation is used to say so about its own children. But this time the phenomenon appears significant due to the same characteristics mentioned in America and Europe as well as in Africa and China.

3.1.1. The Alien generation

1960 was a pivotal date. Generation born after that date —the 'X generation'— has much few points in common with the previous generation than any generation before (at least during the twentieth century). In the Western world, they are influenced by several factors that have shaped them in this different way.

They are free from any war influence: they have not lived one, nor were influenced by parents having lived one; thus no meme (cultural gene) about wartime has been transferred to them. War has become a mediated event, through TV and video-games with weak impact on their reality. This is a major rupture if we consider the history of Europe for example. Hence the loss of some social solidarity (in wartime, you have to rely on others) and the sense of survival (the fact to be ready to do anything to survive). Hence also some uncontrolled expression of violence³⁵, because they have no idea of what real violence is and how quickly mechanisms of war can spring up and locked themselves into action. They are comprehensively richer than their parents, having access to a larger daily comfort provided by technologies (white and brown goods for example). To maintain this comfort, they are usually help by the intergenerational transfers through cash or goods donation or direct inheritance from

³⁴ see Francis FUKUYAMA, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002

³⁵ "Les incivilités ont pour effet, à l'échelle d'un espace limité (commune, quartier, rue...), de violer l'ordre social local en portant atteinte aux apparences, aux convenances, à la décence, à la confiance nécessaires à la vie en société ; de transformer des lieux ouverts en des territoires appropriés par des individus ou groupes ; d'alimenter le sentiment d'insécurité.": Annie BORZEIX, Nathalie RAULET-CROSET, Damien COLLARD, *Les incivilités et leur traitement*

grandparents and by the fact to live longer in their parents' house³⁶. Their commitment to this comfort is particularly strong: they are highly hedonist. For most of them, work is no longer a way of personal achievement but only a mean to earn their living and keep their high standard of life. They look for immediate rewards and are little inclined to long term investment. Implicitly shaped by the '1968 revolution', freedom is their main if not unique flag. They feel free from family authority as well as from any hierarchical authority (school, police, state). Highly individualistic, they have all the rights and very few duties towards the community. Jogging and video games, individualistic by excellence, are their favourite hobbies. When they look for spirituality, Buddhism strongly attracts them.

The following generation, called the "Me/we generation", born in the 80s, is moving on along the same path although slightly different. Besides the same characteristics than their elders, they are interpersonal individualists: their excess of individualism is counterbalanced by their need to belong to a group. Grown up with a cellular phone in the hand, they are flexible, quickly changing their mind in order to adapt themselves to size new opportunities: they are afraid of being stuck without any alternatives. Their optimism regarding their own future is rooted in their certainty that they are capable of achieving what they strive for³⁷. Still more hedonists, they are huge consumers. Very aware that the world is changing, they do not believe in the traditional institutions or the "adults' world"; in fact, adults are no longer a model for them as they have failed to prevent economic crisis, to preserve family (most of them come from reformed families) and to protect environment. Cyberspace is their new planet of games: they play there collective online video games as well as role playing in their relationship with others through chatting. Adults, they will probably have in common the sense of family, a still closer relationship between parents and children with a decreasing demand about the school results of their children (at the opposite of the X generation), as well as a better concern about health quality. Demographic transition, very strong in some European countries during the last decade (a fertility rate about 1.2 for Spain and Italy for example) could slow down with the "Me/we" generation, if specific policies to help early childhood (nurseries) are implemented.

This new generation offers no 'only white' or 'only black' characteristics. It presents paradoxical behaviours, feelings and components, as if always playing a different role. This is what makes so difficult to anticipate its future. What is obvious is that these young people will have to face critical problems during the next twenty years, most of them due to an excessive individualism: violence, deny of justice, corruption, environment degradation and so on. And right now, we don't know how they will react. Some of them, rather a minority, are ready to take risks, such as going out to live abroad, building thus a cosmopolitan society at the world level; they are committed in NGOs and fight to defend their ideas and change the world. The large majority of the others, usually less educated, just refuse to look for a job beyond a distance of twenty-five kilometres from home or the clan area³⁸, living in a welfare state or an 'insurancial' society that has transformed them into continuously assisted people, and they don't care about anything else than their limited surroundings and immediate satisfaction.

If we remember that Athenian democracy required a general commitment to the principal of civic virtue —dedication to the city-state and subordination of private life to public affairs and the common good— then the world to come seems more distant than ever from this model. Individualism has gained such a high rank among the common values that back-peddalling

³⁶ les valeurs des européens

³⁷ Me/we

³⁸ French statistics: this can be different in other countries.

appears impossible. However such a world reveals itself as very unsatisfying for most of humanity. More and more people are now looking for "another world".

3.1.2. Looking for other worlds

Utopia often emerges in periods of transition and reform; as the philosopher Paul RICOEUR expresses it: "When everything is locked by systems that have failed but that can't be defeated... utopia is our resource. It can be a way out but it is also the weapon of critic."³⁹

As the current evolution of the world appears to many as being no longer sustainable or desirable, reflections spring up about the possibility of another world that would bring humanity more happiness. Soft visions try to spread themselves through global think tank networks, non-violent peace movements, pragmatic networks for collaborative work, green organisations, 'anti-globalisation' demonstrations such the World Social Forum, global-justice movements, etc.⁴⁰ Old resorts also come back, often under the appearance of extremism: religious fanaticism, far right or far left ideologies; they look like a final spurt of effort to exist again.

Obviously the entering in the new century is arousing the hope that something could change, that the future could be brighter if only we want it. Alternatives are not so clear: until now they mostly look like utopias description. Will it be sufficient to change the current world? Will the next generations able to carry this dream and achieve it? The future is not written. Yet, what is interesting in this quest is the fact that none of these visions, except perhaps these coming from extremist powers, has ever called democracy into question. Is it because we are unable to think about a third way that would be neither democracy nor tyranny? Or because democracy is so suitable to hedonism and short-termism that it has become a taboo to question it⁴¹? Is there a way to think "out of the box", beyond all that has already been thought, said and written from the beginning of History on? Methodological optimism requires a positive answer.

While technologies of information and communication are bringing new possibilities to manipulate perceptions and minds as well as new means to develop a broader and stronger socialisation, while the search for egoistic pleasures mixes with the worrying for a better world, while democracy finds its limits in individualistic auto-determination, Earth is still spinning around and we have to face the future, whatever it be. Yet, in this new context, we have to arm ourselves to extract the most desirable from this set of possibilities.

3.2. Next challenge ahead: mastering the noosphere

Democracy is the best possible regime in a civilization built on the development of human being as an individual being protected by a State of rights, under a hierarchical pressure. Is there no other possible alternative than obeying by force or by law? Our attachment to the concept of democracy can lead to two different issues: either a strong enough tenacity to continue on its path until we finally reach it, as an almost perfect model; or such a blindness

³⁹ Paul RICOEUR, *L'Idéologie et l'Utopie* [Ideology and Utopia], Paris : Le Seuil, 2005

⁴⁰ see <http://www.anotherworldispossible.org/>, <http://www.worldchanging.com/>, <http://www.pekea-fr.org/>, <http://www.commondreams.org/views02/0201-01.htm>, <http://www.licc.org.uk/culture/another-world-is-possible>

⁴¹ José SARAMAGO, "Reinventing democracy", in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, english version, August 2004

that we would be unable to get out of what has perhaps become a dead end and to imagine new modes to govern ourselves?

Beyond concepts and practices, democracy is a word just bounded by our limited capability to think the future. We are human beings, the only Earth species which is able to think, explore and shape the future: in some way, this is our unique certainty. So it should not afraid us to think beyond this word to shape a new vision for our future, to define a new challenge to free individuals from political parties or approaches that lock them in an obsolete pattern of opposition, conflicts, and sometimes quasi war.

The Greek democracy, as some sort of direct and elitist approach of the power, was the best regime to face the constraints of this far past. The modern democracy, built up on a representative and somehow less elitist approach, intermediated by the state and civil society, was probably the best regime considering the situation of the nineteenth century. However, already during the twentieth century, it has demonstrated some limits such as its inability to prevent totalitarianism and its own soft tyranny. Analyzing the 90s has shown how deep is the change underlying this time of transition. In Tiananmen Square and along the Berlin Wall, individuals have succeeded in recreating hope, some new enchantment, the idea that the world could change in a positive way. Undoubtedly, collective manifestations of these individuals —most of them genuinely free from influence of the old parties or ideologies— are seeds for a new kind of actor: the world public opinion. Its forming proves that individualism — considered as the current source of all our evils— can be counterbalanced by a sense of solidarity and a new sort of intercourse. It also says something about the desire of "another world".

Fifty years ago, Pierre TEILHARD DE CHARDIN explained how the noosphere could lead towards the emergence of a global consciousness emerging from the interactions of human minds⁴². Internet has made this convergence possible today, and the world public opinion could well express it. Hence the urgent need to provide individuals the means to master the noosphere, that is to acquire within it the freedom they have got in the biosphere.

Basically noosphere is about globalisation and information. Information, from raw data to highly complex knowledge, is submitted to positive as well as negative processes: some can free people; others can send them in jail unjustly. Manipulation is its plague. To protect it from all these dangers, including these mentioned above endangering democracy, there is only one solution, universal, global: education.

Education alone —not only as knowing read, write and count and using a computer and practicing at least one foreign language, but also as a capability to forge one's opinion— can build the critical and compassionate mind needed to free individuals from the intellectual chains of the soft tyranny (political correctness, mass-media). As Renaissance is rooted both in the invention of printing and the spreading of academe, new Enlightenments can be drawn up from the invention of Internet and the spreading of a new, future-oriented education.

Such an education would be focused on three basic fields. The first would be the mastering of information by the development of a critical mind, checking of information sources, detection of manipulation and a better knowledge about mass-media industry's functioning and lobbying stakes. The second field would be futures studies/foresight in order to better grasp current evolutions, understand the macro-historical components of humanity development and be able to chose and shape one's future. The third field would encompass 'moral' and civic education, through a mix of political science, sociology and comparative history of religions and ideas and

⁴² Pierre TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, *L'avenir de l'Homme*, Paris : Seuil, 1959 [1947] ; Phillip J. CUNNINGHAM, "Teilhard de Chardin and the Noosphere", *Computer-Mediated Communication Magazine*, March 1997

through 'civic practice' as volunteer in a registered NGO. Thus individualism could be bound by experience of solidarity, soft tyranny by information and short-termism by futures-oriented aspirations. Such "beyond-democracy"- and "beyond-civil society"-oriented education could teach not only what liberty is but how to practice it, in order to become efficient citizens, informed consumer and positive humanists.

4. Conclusion

Two forces of change seem to be facing themselves: the traditional world built on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries values: accumulation of wealth, wild consumption, experiment of anarchical freedom, lack of distance in relation with events and herd submission to the mass-media distorted voice; and the next world, slowly emerging from the limbo: looking for meaning rather than wealth, sustainable consumption, global concern for human development (mainly peace, welfare and education), critical mind and world public opinion. This paradigm shift follows the model of adolescence: a teenager is torn apart by contradictory forces, one which push him to stay a child, protected and irresponsible, and the other one pulling him towards adulthood and all its consequences. This stage of growing up always produces violence, whatever encapsulated or wildly expressed; this violence can be seen today everywhere in the world, from a form of dull violence, ordinary, durable, that undermines the everyday life, to the incredible savagery of ethnic massacres...

It is probably the price to pay to grow up, to become a more mature humanity. We can just look at it and long for maturity to come. Or we can act as we were responsible of own future by supporting, accompanying, educating this rebellious child on the way to a tame freedom, to a highest humanity.

