

PHILOSOPHIE ET DEMOCRATIE EN EUROPE

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PHILOSOPHY, ETHNIC IDENTITY AND DEMOCRACY

Vassil Prodanov

In my paper I am going to tackle with the new dilemmas which face the theory of democracy and education in the context of the current ethnic revival and the emergence of a new kind of ethnicity different from the past forms of ethnicity. In this context social philosophy has to come up again with the old issues of unity and plurality of the individual and social life.

1. A new kind of ethnicity

The other "face" of post-industrial world is the ethnic diversity. Industrial mass society and urbanization tended to diminish and erase ethnic distinctions and create common mass culture. That reflects also on the level of governmental policies to establish national identities, especially in multi-ethnic states. For the last twenty years in the developed world, opposing processes of ethnic revival and ethnic diversity were under way.

Ethnicity turns out to be one of the most important distinctions because it provides people with a set of roots, of deep past and of affective ties. These feelings and connections with some *Gemeinschaft* cannot be derived from the liberal state, which by definition is an artificial body of abstract individuals through a rational covenant. Where there is human need for affective and deeper roots in some community the abstract individual provides only an alienated individual in need of identity.

The rise of a new ethnicity today reflects not just the desire of the individual for strong attachments to some group, but is connected with the development of the background, role and place of ethnicity in the society.

I would like to distinguish between *three types of ethnicity in the course of the human history*- total ethnicity, nationality and new ethnicity.

Total ethnicity, We could distinguish one type of ethnicity in pre-modern time in traditional societies. This is an ethnicity of different cultures with a higher degree of autonomy; a total ethnicity which included all activities and is created by all activities: the individual is overwhelmed entirely by his ethnic culture and in most cases does not belong to dif-

ferent cultures. Ethnic culture was not just one of the different types of culture; it included the entire life activity of an individual. Ethnic community was the place where most of his life took place, and all individual activity was a reproduction and development of ethnic culture.

Nationality. We find another type of ethnicity in the modern world. An additional political element has been added to ethnic culture and identity. Thus they are transformed into a national culture and the national identity of people who fight to live in their own state, other than the one they live, which implies growing conflicts between ethnic groups and states. The development of mass communications, mass culture, mass production, mass consumption and mass society tends to do away with ethnic differences within the national state. The attitude that ethnicity is a residue from the past and will remain there is popular. Ethnic cultures seem to concern the old crafts, oral tradition and the creation of songs, tales, myth, etc., that is, to be folklore cultures which can survive only in museums life. Ethnic groups and ethnicity lose their function of reference groups and identities, which is now largely taken by nation and national identity.

A new ethnicity. We find new dimensions also in the ethnicity of a post-industrial and post-modern world. If the objective processes of the industrial societies and the governmental policies were directed to subordinate, to reshape ethnicity into national identity and either to unite ethnicity with the state or to erase it, the objective processes and governmental policies of the post-industrial societies are intended to cut the close ties between ethnicity and nationality, and to concede and promote ethnic diversity and ethnic pluralism within the national state.

There is a shift from the grand narratives and the old unificatory ideologies of the Enlightenment to more particularistic culturally rooted values, patterns and models of social explanation. The increasing significance of post-materialist values promote the growing role of various kinds of ethnic values and national traditions. The economy becomes more symbolic and leads to activist nationalism and ethnicism, not merely in remote places like Armenia and Azerbaijan, Albania and Serbia, but in New York and Nagoya, Liverpool and Lyon. Its strongest and most typical manifestations could be found in the USA since the 1960's. It turns out that the melting pot of Americanization and homogenization has its limitations; side by side with a common American identity different ethnic identities retain their existence. National identity does not replace ethnic identity; the two can coexist.

It is noteworthy that until the 60's, the more commonly employed term concerning one's individual descent was "nationality." People were said to have different "national", not different "ethnic" origins. "National-

ity" had more political connotations; it is "ethnicity", but only with reference to some state. But during more recent decades this pattern of thinking has been overturned. The turning point would seem to have been in the '60s and '70s. Until that time the most common term in the political and social discourse was "civil rights." This discourse of the "civil rights" was the old political discourse about classical political predicaments: the relationship between majority and minorities and the equality of individuals in their rights. The "diversity" became the catchword of discourse in the 80's and 90's. The major connotations in this discourse imply:

- a) not relationships between majority and minorities, but a situation in which in some sense all are minorities;
- b) if the struggle for civil rights referred to something common for all people (their rights), if then it was a struggle against any distinction and discrimination, now the struggle is to preserve some differences;
- c) the distinctions, however, are not political but cultural: if political distinctions have depreciated, cultural distinctions are now appreciated.

Under the impact of the new system of production, a resistance to the old "melting pot" of nationalistic assimilation is rising everywhere. Racial, ethnic, and religious groups demand the right to be and to remain proudly different. Where assimilation was the ideal of industrial society, corresponding to its need for an homogeneous work force diversity is the new ideal corresponding to the heterogeneity of the new system of wealth creation. The ideal of homogeneity (in Japan, for example) or of the melting pot (in the United States) is being replaced by that of "the salad bowl" in which different ingredients keep their identity.¹

In modern societies it was not ethnicity, but nationality which had the highest value. The reference group was the nation rather than the ethnic group which too often hinted at something backward and was poorly valued. Now the situation has changed: and the ethnic group once again has become the important referent group and ethnicity has a higher value.

But this is neither the "total ethnicity" of the pre-modern societies nor "the total nationality"⁷ of the modern nationalistic nation. Rather, this ethnicity is partial because it does not embrace all the individual's life, but is one of its social spaces and manifestations. This is ethnicity in a global society with intensive communications. Much of the activities of the individual, especially his work, could be outside his ethnic group and reflect general rather than ethnic conditions. Accordingly, the ethnic identity does not include in itself all of an individual's identity, but is connected first of all within one's private life and one's activity in the civil society.

At a more superficial level this is ethnicity, not of isolated, but of interrelated cultures. People have their own ethnic identity and culture but are continuously in contact with other ethnic cultures. Moreover, not merely are they in contact, they consume different ethnic cultures. One lives not in his ethnic world, but in a world market of ethnic diversity. This means that ethnicity is marketized or supplied as a commodity and can be consumed as a commodity. Different cuisines, dresses and wares with ethnic signs of different cultures are sold. The ethnic past and its symbols become tourist landmarks. One could leave one's ethnic culture and spend one's vacation in some other exotic ethnic milieu. Thus, ethnicity becomes like a dress which can be put on and taken off, used for different goals, to be chosen or discarded.

Most often, however, people have deeper emotional identifications with one culture and use other cultures superficially as ways of entertainment. Accordingly, at a deeper level ethnicity plays the role of the "place" of deep emotional affection that is much more difficult to receive than identification with the contemporary liberal state and its calls for patriotism. It is also a way to use the past retrospectively, a way to find some stability and insurability in an increasingly rapidly changing world. In this is the world of "future shock," of dissolving family ties, of permanent changes of professions, places of residence, things, attachments people find in ethnicity the kind of stable attachment that links them affectively with many people in society today and in the past. Often the ethnic group serves as a support group as well. This is especially true for new migrants who look to people with the same origin. The ethnic group is the best way to enter, adapt and accommodate themselves in the new society.

The New Dilemmas

I would like to point out two areas of dilemmas concerning the emergence of a new ethnicity:

1. *Ethnicity and democracy*

The shift to diversity in general and to ethnic diversity in particular is changing the fundamental notions that prevailed in the modern liberal theory of democracy.

First. The views concerning the major subject of the representative democracy that prevailed until now, passed through two stages. In the classical theory of modern democracy the separate individuals have been considered as major participants in the democratic life. They are

equal and each one has the same rights and the same vote. From the 1950s Robert Dahl developed the idea of pluralist democracy or polyarchy where the major actors are various organized groups, a variety of autonomous organizations and associations. Today in postmodern conditions one observes the growing role of ethnic groups and cultural associations in the democratic processes. People take part in the public life by virtue of their "blood". In some sense it presents a return to a pre-modern state when a type of natural-historical entity becomes a ground of the political life and legitimation process.

Second. According to the modern democratic theory and practice, it was not necessary that all the representatives in different political bodies be of the same origin and have the same personal characteristics as the people whose interests they represented. Their relations were contractual: one was chosen to represent people, not because he carried in his own nature or essence their demands, interests and predicaments, but for his readiness to carry out an obligation or public duty. This understanding was part of the liberal individualistic tradition. The new ethnicity, however, brings with it a much more communitarian view about the nature of representation. According to this view, the main abilities and virtues of a good representative result from the membership in the group or community. He or she is not an abstract individual or incumbent distinct from his or her obligations as representative, but a certain individual from the same group, the same community, bearing the main characteristics of that community. He does not just represent this community, he belongs to this community. That is why for example the political leaders are increasingly including in their teams representatives of various ethnic minorities in order to receive their support. Accordingly, it is understandable that black people tend to prefer black representatives, the Spanish speaking communities prefer representatives from their milieu, women their own representatives, etc. A very important trend is the election not of mere party candidates for different positions, but people from the various communities of a diverse society.

This is true not just for legislative bodies, but for all governmental positions and public bodies. In this regard, the shift in police is noteworthy, namely, in many places there is a desire to recruit policemen according to the composition of the local population. Ethnicity brings with itself new communitarian thought, new normative theory.

2. *Ethnicity and education*

The new ethnicity brought with it the issues of multiculturalism and relationship between particularism and universalism in educational systems. The rise of the modern nations is in many aspects a result of the

homogenization process of the mass education with its common standards. It annihilated the old local ethnic and language distinctions and created the modern nations and nation states. Now an opposite process of cultural and ethnic pluralisation in the education systems is under way. Dealing with cultural diversity in education is high on the agenda in a world with about 5 000 ethnic groups and only about 200 states. Multiculturalism is one of the most significant topics of our time, but there is a deep uncertainty about how it should be handled. Should our focus on diversity split teaching? Should it contribute to a singular national culture of liberal democracy? There are no simple and easy answers to these questions. For several reasons my own answers have a more universalistic than particularistic character. First. Any pluralist answer will send us in a pre-modern world of "total ethnic identities", rather different from the new ethnicity. Second. Any ethnic particularism in education curricuiums will neglect the strong processes of globalization tendency in the world today. Moreover, just the globalisation of markets for capital, labor and commodities allows the new revival of ethnicity. And this global aspect is extremely important for any education system as well. Third. The ethnic particularism presupposes epistemological relativism that is in contrast to any valid knowledge. Fourth, The emphasis on multiculturalism brings with it a threat of social fragmentation. But the events in today's world demonstrate that it is a rather conflicting, bloody and perilous perspective.