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Opponent's review of the Ph.D. Dissertation

«Liberal democracy: a globalizing hegemonic trajectory»

by Eleftherios Sarantis

The issue of rethinking liberal democracy is particularly acute in the modern world. The ideologists of the Western European political system have always considered the democratic regime something self-valuable and unchallengeable – something not to be disputed, opposed, or defeated, and since Francis Fukuyama's invention of the "end of history" model liberal democracy seems absolutely uncontested to all other types of political systems. But is that really the case? Is it true that the "end of history" as a point where we achieve a perfect and consistent state of social development is the reality of our days? What are the relations between modern political and economic communications then? Could it be that the prevailing view of things is simply imposed on the whole society?

Driven, among other things, by the search for answers to these questions, E. Sarantis analyzes a topical issue of philosophical understanding of the phenomenon of liberal democracy. The author carries out the analysis through a prism of global problems facing our world today, the theory of elites and Antonio Gramsci's methodology. The main goal of the dissertation is to find the answer to the question: "Does liberal democracy constitute a globalizing hegemony at the expense of the poor?"

The dissertation consists of three chapters. The main text is preceded by an interesting theoretical and methodological introduction "A Theoretical Umbrella: Gramscism", in which the author clarifies the meaning and context of the use of the term "hegemony" mentioned in the title of the dissertation. In addition, the author focuses on the detailed analysis of the difference between the theory of Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci, trying to justify the applicability of Gramsci's concept to the study of not only post-WWI society and the economy, but also of contemporary social reality.

It is easy to notice that the author's style, way of analysis and presentation of the material are largely determined by the sympathy for the already somewhat unfairly forgotten Italian communist philosopher Antonio Gramsci. And while we will move through the detailed analysis of the dissertation chapters, let's keep in mind that the author's vision of chain of historical events which up to now determine the existence of the modern Western political system includes: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the stratification of post-war society into the elite and the poor and, as a consequence, economic, injustice in the modern world.

The first chapter "The hegemonic role of liberal democracy" is devoted to an analysis of the historical and philosophical prerequisites for the emergence of modern liberal democracy. The author gives a critical overview of the ancient democracy and the ideals of modern liberal democracy (for example, the UN system). The author claims that the political structure of a given society and its system of political values are fundamental for its functioning even in the economic sphere. That is, the economy is secondary to politics. In addition, in the summarizing part of the chapter, its last paragraph, after an extremely critical assessment of modern liberal democracy, the author offers his own "fifth way" for the development of democracy, which is the synthesis of the approaches of Acemoglu, Robinson, Bauman and Crouch.

The author believes that it is the second chapter that constitutes the academic core of the entire paper. In the chapter "Radical democracy and the revocable vote" the author discusses Hegelian "end of history" idea and reflects critically on the works of Francis Fukuyama, Herbert Marcuse and Chantal Mouffe on Gramsci, once again exploring the term hegemony and introducing new categories such as "radical democracy" and "war of positions", in which an important role is given to the cultural (mainly media) superiority of one position over another. "War of positions" is not only able to raise conflict between elites and the unprivileged classes, as it may seem to many inspired by classical Marxist theory, but also to peacefully resolve this conflict. Hegemony is in many ways an artificial construct, not a natural phenomenon in society, and therefore needs an intellectual and philosophical justification or criticism.

The third chapter of the dissertation "The essential importance of direct democracy", according to the author, is indicated as an additional and accessory one to the second chapter. However, it is worth noting that, to my opinion, it is the most philosophical and interesting part of the research. In this chapter, the author focuses on the philosophical anthropology aspects of the topic under study. E. Sarantis addresses such issues as the subject (self), fear of death, alienation. By addressing the fundamental problems of human existence, the author gets the opportunity to present a potential democracy in a new, "true" (to the author's opinion) way, opposed to the trajectory of the consumer society. The existential analysis of human existence serves to justify a new system of democratic voting, advocated by the author – revocable democracy. According to E. Sarantis, it is historically linked with Greek, Athenian democracy, which allowed to resolve various questions involving maximum number of people without elected representatives. Most interesting from the philosophical point of view is that all existential problems and contradictions, which the author discusses in this chapter, can be "transcended" ("Aufheben").

Naming the advantages of the dissertation, I would like to mention the author's philosophical courage in formulating the important philosophical and political tasks

facing modern society, the presence of a clear introduction and conclusion to each chapter of the paper, as well as the rich and diverse socio-philosophical material used in the research. The author's style of writing is notable for its logic and consistency.

As another merit of the dissertation, I should note, is that the author consciously and between the lines clearly develops an approach to rethinking the idea of justice, taking into account the current political and economic experience. Sarantis' intension for a critical analysis of the role of elites in political life makes us once again think about the serious issues and, of course, will allow us to consider this layer in detail through the future works of the author. The dissertation in this case is the foundation for further research in the field of social philosophy.

However, I should also stop on the weak parts of the research, which are the continuation of its strong parts. For example, having selected as a methodological basis of the dissertation the works of a certain circle of philosophers, the author excluded from his sight the ideologists of the classic analysis of liberal democracy phenomenon. In my opinion, there are good reasons for including the critical overview of the works by I. Wallerstein, M. Friedman, T. Hayek, R. Dvorkin, I. Berlin, and others, in this dissertation.

Focusing on the weaknesses of the research, I have a caution for the author. The dissertation has a very clear political engagement, which makes the philosopher, as the history of philosophy obviously shows, always very vulnerable. Thus, Marx's famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, stating that the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, whereas the point is to change it, can be adopted by various political forces. Therefore, practical significance of any research not only lies in its value for our society, but also places a very serious responsibility on the author for the conclusions to which he comes. After all, political conclusions suggest their implementation as a logical consequence, their applicability in practice.

The third critical remark concerns the methodological introduction to the thesis. Of course, it can be seen as a strong part of the research, but since Gramsci's ideas

permeate the entire dissertation, the analysis of various other methodological approaches, as well as the author's own approach, could be presented in a separate chapter of the dissertation, which would made possible a more fundamental presentation of the author's position.

And, finally, another critical comment can be addressed to the structure of the research. The text of the dissertation abounds in history of philosophy references. On the one hand, this reinforces and justifies all the statements that the author puts forward. But, on the other hand, this kind of free juggling with history of philosophy materials allows us to substantiate almost any state of things. It seems that it would be more reasonable to present this material in a separate (first or second) chapter of the dissertation, rather than scattering the analysis of Greek democracy, the concept of A. Gramsci, the existentialism problems in paragraphs of different chapters.

Nevertheless, the above-mentioned critical comments do not detract from the high evaluation of the research, which fully meets all the criteria for the doctoral dissertation. The author's contribution to the research on a given topic is sufficiently large to award him with a Ph.D. degree.

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14.04.2014