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DEMOCRACY, INTERPASSIVITY, AND THE COGNITOCRATIC FALLACY¹

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ABSTRACT

Conceptions of deliberative democracy attach a particularly important role to the cognitive or epistemological competence of the agents of the political process. Such competence is viewed as a primary or even exclusive prerequisite qualifying one for the exercise of political power. The belief is amply illustrated by the contemporary debate between, on the one hand, the advocates of the broad participation of the people in democratic governance, and, on the other, the proponents of the deliberative ideal which presupposes that political power should be entrusted only to the people endowed with appropriate cognitive abilities. In my analysis of such cognitocratic conceptions, I stress the perils of the ascription of a prominent role to cognitive competence in the political process. In opposition to the cognitocratic approaches, both in their universalist and egalitarian, as well as elitist or meritocratic versions, I claim that they are marred by what I call the cognitocratic fallacy, and I argue that a more adequate understanding of governance in democratic systems should instead be based upon a political rather than epistemological capital. I also claim that the concept of political ability should be seen as potentially universal and that the potential may be activated through actual participation in democratic politics.

Keywords: cognitive fallacy, democracy, knowledge, power, cognitocracy, political skill.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of managing a political community through decision-making in which the people are both the sovereign and the subject is at the core of the ideal type of democracy. Democracy is based on the assumption that all citizens of a political community can participate in the exercise of power and that they are equal in their political rights. Democracy thus understood appears in politi-

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cal rhetoric, most significantly in Abraham Lincoln's speech in which he defined democracy as "the rule of the people, through the people, for the people" (Lincoln, 1998, 267), and in the Constitution of the Republic of France whose article 2 states that "Son principe est: gouvernement du peuple, par le peuple et pour le peuple."

Despite the simplicity and persuasiveness of the ideal, a deep sense of disillusion with the really existing democracies is justified by the deficiencies of its practical implementations. As Pierre Rosanvallon remarked, "our regimes are democratic, but we are not governed democratically" (Rosanvallon, 2018, 1; Müller, 2020). Indeed, the realities of modern democracies resemble rather the technique of crowd management than the inclusive of ideal democracy. Failure to implement fully the above normative idea of democracy in the harsh political realities inspired many alternative models of democracy. There is thus a direct, and representative democracy; a democracy based on the idea of checks and balances, and on popular participation. There are also the agonist, the illiberal, the centralist, and other models of democracy. An important element of democratic governance is also transparency of the political life, frequently violated even in the established democracies of the Global North, as well as responsibility and accountability for the decisions made, which political elites across the board usually and successfully immunize themselves from. The variety of meanings of the concept of democracy and the number of its models suggest that the very democratic process consists in continuous elaborations of ever new freedoms and equalities,

"but throughout this process, the reference to the signifier 'democracy' is a constant, and the ideological struggle is precisely the struggle to impose an ever-new meaning on this term. [...] The very plasticity of the signified content (the struggle for what democracy 'really means') relies on the fixity of the empty signifier 'democracy'" (Žižek, 2009, 120).

In this paper, I discuss the gist of the debate between the deliberationist and participationist views of democracy. First, I shall adduce several illustrations of theoretical and practical ailments of the present-day democracies, and then consider whether the deliberationist position, with its belief in epistemological or cognitive abilities as necessary legitimation to the exercise of political power, might save democracy from its deficiencies.

AILMENTS OF DEMOCRACY

The concept of democracy as the rule of the people by people for the people is also ambiguous and marred by numerous well-diagnosed problems. The most obvious of them is related to the ambiguity of the very concept of the people. Throughout most of history, the people have been conceived as a human mass

distinct from the middle, proprietorial, and aristocratic classes. The people were not regarded as an integral part of the fabric of society and had no title to a share in power. On the theoretical plane, Plato was one of the first political philosophers to exclude people from politics. Though he makes Socrates say that “The object on which we fixed our eyes in the establishment of our state was not the exceptional happiness of any one class but the greatest possible happiness of the city as a whole” (Plato, *Rep.*, 420c), he designed a polity in which the lower castes had no say in its management; he thought that their happiness will better be taken care of by someone else. According to Leo Strauss, the features of the soul of the lower castes of the ideal of *politeia* prevent them from knowing the idea of justice, therefore they “yearn for tyranny, i.e., extreme injustice” (Strauss, 1987, 47). Plato believed that it was possible to enhance and promote political deliberation, but only in a way that resembled his Socratic dialogues because he did not believe that rational considerations of political matters could be possible in the broad informal public sphere in which such figures as Gorgias or Protagoras held sway. As Simone Chambers stressed, for Plato, the public sphere cannot be deliberative because it cannot be dialogical (Chambers, 2009, 323–324). Similar conclusions are nowadays drawn by proponents of deliberative democracy.

Theoretical justifications for the exclusion of the people from the governance of political communities, as well as proposals to the contrary, were long preceded by exclusionary political practice. At the beginnings of the era of popular revolts, which ended some three centuries later with the establishment of the Athenian democracy, Heraclitus formulated a conception of cosmic rationality which, as he thought, permeated everything. From it would follow that all human beings, as everything else in the Universe, partake in the cosmic Logos. Realizing the potentially egalitarian consequences of his conception, glaringly incongruent with the realities of Greek politics, he moderated it by claiming that in most people the part of the cosmic reason they appropriated is dormant, therefore they do not have full command of themselves and are prone to act against the law of nature by word and deed which has negative consequences both for them and their society. Plato’s anti-egalitarian strictures, in particular in *Phaedrus*, were also preceded by a less known Anacharsis, a contemporary of Solon who, having participated as an observer in the Athenian Assembly, remarked that in the Greek *polis* the causes were pleaded by sages, but decisions were made by a bunch of fools and ignoramuses (Plutarch, 1914, v. 3–vi. 30). The beginnings of democracy are thus confluent with the emergence of the opposition between those who recognised the right to participate in power by all members of the political community, and those claiming that the exercise of political power is open only to people endowed with certain abilities, among which, as in Plato, the most important were rational cognitive abilities.

Out of many problems which undermine the ideal type of democracy, the following two seem to be of paramount importance. First, the people cannot

rule directly and permanently the entire community: the institutions of the state cannot be turned into “a mere administrative machinery manned by an actually governing citizenry” (Satia, 2008, 8). For this reason, the system of representative democracy emerged. Under this system, all citizens elect their representatives to exercise power. The representatives, however, are not to be bound by the mandate of the section of the people who elected them: they are supposed to be unfettered by the particular interests of their supporters and are to act and decide with the welfare of the whole society in mind. This is the gist of the “free mandate,” the idea formulated by Emanuel-Joseph Sieyès (1789). Norberto Bobbio stresses that the essential principle of the parliamentary system is that representatives are not to accept any binding mandate from those who had elected them (Bobbio, 1999, 29). This principle immediately raises the problem addressed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the most ardent opponent of representative democracy. Rousseau’s conception of democracy is close to the ideal type mentioned above; he believed that the moment the people exercised their power through their representatives, they deprive themselves of their freedom (Rousseau, 2002, 223; Bertram, 2012). Against Hobbes he argued that individual sovereignty is “the exercise of the general will [which] can never be alienated” (Rousseau, 2002, 171).

The second fundamental problem with the type of ideal democracy is that entrusting the management of the state to a government elected in a general plebiscite, without additional controlling mechanisms, leads to the tyranny of the majority. The problem is not only the danger of the tyranny of the majority itself but also of justifying the legitimacy of these controlling mechanisms within a democracy. The ideal type of democracy assumes that democracy does not require external legitimation: democracy is the source and the instrument of its own legitimation: the only possible way of legitimizing the controlling mechanisms of democracy is democracy itself.

The above issues are far from purely theoretical as they are abundantly affecting political practice. For democracy is ailing today not only as a theory but also as a practice. Suffice it to mention several such problems. In an increasing number of countries, various individuals, their groups, and formations obtain their political mandate through popular, thus seemingly democratic vote. Yet elections are also organized by political regimes of various kinds, including those known for a systemic violation of the inclusive conception of democratic rule. Even despotic regimes feel they need the ritual of democratic election to legitimize their power.

Also, various political groupings, having achieved electoral success, not infrequently dismantle democratic institutions thanks to which they have won their dominant position, using the democratic consent of the electorate they won as the justification for undoing democracy: anti-democratic actions in this way acquire a democratic legitimacy. This is the democracy paradox, first named and diagnosed by Karl Popper (Popper, 1994, 581–582).

The problems also lie not only in the mechanism of democratic elections but in the way the mechanism is employed for various purposes. Suffice it to note that the democratic electoral mechanisms were used, on the one hand, by the family of billionaires Robert and Rebekah Mercer, who contributed to the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States (Svenson, 2018) and, on the other hand, by another billionaire, George Soros who tried to influence, with varying degrees of success, the electoral verdict in the United States and elsewhere, most ominously in Ukraine. This suggests that despite various controlling and balancing mechanisms, a democratic verdict may easily be bent to the wishes of potent players. The gravity of the problem may be conveyed by pondering on the difference between the Mercers-the-billionaires and Soros-a-billionaire. The difference lies not in the democratic mechanism which they take advantage of to pursue their political aims, but in the values advocated by them. Therefore, when speaking today about the political crisis, we mean not so much the crisis of democratic mechanisms but rather the degeneration of socially accepted values. But this point undermines the belief that democracy can self-reflexively justify itself, and suggests that democracy is sustained by normative principles which it must draw from outside the democratic mechanism itself. This suggestion closely parallels Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde's dictum that "The liberal, secularized state is sustained by conditions it cannot itself guarantee" (Böckenförde, 2020, 167).

The really-existing systems of democratic governance are prone to other maladies. Despite the apparent democratization of many countries in the world, the view of the people as a mass incapable of participating in politics is still embraced by many political theories, especially those of liberal, conservative, and nationalistic tilt. To bring in a pertinent example, Ivan Ilyin, Vladimir Putin's favourite philosopher, believes that ideas of democratization, federalization and freedom, are but western ruses to subjugate Russia. Democracy in such a large country as Russia is believed to be impossible as it would ensure its disintegration. Similar arguments can be heard from the politicians of the People's Republic of China, whose size generates similar problems.

The tension between an idea of an orderly, stable social body in which everyone has their place, and the "the part of those who have no-part," (Rancière, 1999, 30; cf. also Žižek, 2001, 89–90; Žižek, 1993)² that undermines the existing order, seems to be a feature of the most present democratic systems. This part is precisely the *demos* which, though it gave the name to the concept of democracy, does not find a place for itself in it. This can be illustrated by the fact that even though Article XV of the Bill of Rights of the United States provides that "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied

² Rancière's concept "the part of those who have no-part," does not seem to appear in the English versions of Slavoj Žižek's paper "Enjoy Our Nation as Yourself" (1993. *Tarring with the Negative. Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology*. Durham: Duke University Press, 200–238), included by the author in the Polish edition of his *Plague of Fantasies* (2001).

or abridged by the United States or by an State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude,” American political parties display impressive ingenuity in limiting, suppressing or denying the voting rights of the US citizens, especially people of colour or some ethnicities, whom they believe might vote in a way unfavourable to them.

Above all, democracy is marred by social and economic exclusions. The ruling elites tend to identify certain groups of people as less worthy members of society and deprive them of their full civic rights. The exclusion may be based on the local political culture, non-political customs, or even on the law. For example, people of ethnic origin different from the dominant in a given political community (people of colour, Jews, Rohingya), women and people of a different religion (Muslims) or with non-binary sexual preferences are excluded on the basis of customs and the prevailing political culture. A novel example of a legal exclusion is the bulk prohibition or obstruction of the appointment of office by persons who in the past were involved in the communist regime. Such democratically imposed exclusion, though has little to do with democracy, is eagerly supported by aspiring candidates for the ruling elite who were not so entangled because it makes it easier for them to gain access to power.

The practical implementation of the view of the people as political patients rather than agents has done much to encourage the atrophy of individual and collective political agency. This is usually blamed on the people themselves, i.e., on their inability to understand their interests and their lack of political skills, but also on poor education and the general degeneration of political culture. The situation is aggravated by economic differences and social inequalities which are at the core of social hierarchies, and which, when pushed to the limits, excite the unprivileged majority to intermittent revolts against the privileged, disrupting the existing social order.

Yet another problem and a permanent fixture of democratic systems, which mirrors the former one, is populism. Populism is about vying for electoral support through persuasive rhetoric of anxiety and empty promises. Populism preys on the people’s tendency to succumb to herd instincts and deceptive visions of prosperity. Populism transmutes into authoritarianism, encouraged by impatience with the arduous decision-making process and the necessity to make compromises that are usually seen as unsatisfactory by anyone involved.

INTERPASSIVE DEMOCRACY

The symptoms of the democratic crisis are a result of deeper processes. Perhaps the most important of them is the systemic immoralization of politics. The traditional belief that “public virtue is the only foundation of republics” (Lasch, 1996, 94) has been replaced with the idea that a proper system of constitutional institutional of checks and balances “will make it advantageous even for bad men to act for the public good” (Lasch, 1996, 94).

The inclusive ideal of democracy is particularly undermined by the atrophy of individual subjectivity and agency which is tantamount to the abdication of responsibility for oneself, one's immediate surroundings, and the whole political community. If the political institutions take care of the morality and welfare of individuals, the individuals feel relieved of the obligation to morally discipline themselves and to go about their own interests themselves. Individuals who perceive public institutions as mechanisms that compel them to respect the rules of moral decency, forsake their own internal ability to impose them on themselves. In this way they forsake the moral ability to cultivate civic virtues by themselves: their inner conscience is replaced by external formal control. This Rousseauan critique of representative democracy may be developed with the help of the concept of interpassivity (Pfaller, 2017; Žižek, 2001; Chmielewski, 2020).

The phenomenon of interpassivity may be explained by a rather graphic illustration taken from the practice of academic education. At a certain university, a professor was particularly skilled in the employment of cutting-edge teaching aids. Over time, his multimedia presentations became ever more perfect and gradually filled all his lecture time. He soon discovered that his perfected presentations may temporarily replace his attendance at his own lecture. One day, having switched on the equipment that conveyed the content to the students, he left the lecture hall just for a brief moment to deal with matters important to him in academic offices. Gradually, such absences during his own lecture became his new routine and expanded over time. Towards the end of the semester, having switched on his presentation, he left the room again. Upon re-entering it after an absence longer than usual, he found it ... empty. Following the example of their lecturer, the students went to deal with matters important to them in the academic café, leaving dictaphones on their benches to record the lecture conveyed by the computer. One may say that the lecture did take place as scheduled, but it did so without the personal participation of its main actor, the teacher, and its main audience, the students. In other words, the course was not formally interrupted but turned into a completely impersonal, empty ritual that served no one. This anecdote perfectly illustrates that in certain social systems or institutions the employment of substitutes generates vicariousness which makes spurious both human subjectivity and agency.

Something like that happens in representative democracy. The very idea of representative democracy is about building vicarious mechanisms which enable the people to delegate their will to their representatives who are to strive for their aims on their behalf. One may thus say that the authentic political agency undergoes the process of formalization, and interactive participation in the democratic process turns into an interpassive attitude. The transformation of civic interactivity into interpassivity, which is a form of alienation and is responsible for the present transformation of democracy into its own façade, seems inscribed in the very nature of representative democracy. The political

systems persist thanks to the transference of the effort of care for oneself and society onto the substitute institutions and mechanisms which encourage the attitude of vicariousness.

The system of representation is today justified and sanctified by the dominant models and is reinforced by them. According to Joseph Schumpeter's pluralist-elitist and Robert Dahl's polyarchic models, the political elites, selected through political parties, formulate various and differing political projects which they present to citizens to choose from. Power is vested in the champions of the project supported by the majority. In this pluralist-elitist model, the people choose their representatives to delegate to them the tasks of thinking about the welfare of the political community and taking care of their interests for them.

The phenomenon of interpassivity is manifested also in the calls for the professionalization of politics. The very fact of their democratic election is not infrequently interpreted by representatives as a demonstration of their particular abilities and competence which predestine them for political decision-making. They also tend to believe that those unsuccessful or uninterested in politics are immature and in need of their guidance. Such a view of politics, promulgated by the mainstream and social media, fosters among the public the attitude of withdrawal from political life and abandoning active participation in it. As already mentioned, this is being blamed on inadequate civic education. Among the existing educational institutions, religious institutions remain the most powerful, but they cannot be expected to support democratic forms of governance or promote civic political agency. Ultimately, modern political systems, though embellished with the attributes of democracy, become rather systems of crowd management and have little to do with the normative ideal of democratic governance.

The fact that the people hand over their political agency in an interpassive manner to the elite transforms them into a non-political subject. But their absenteeism has further grave consequences. Like in the above anecdote about the academic lecturer, the depoliticization of the people and their withdrawal to the comfort zone of their privacy is accompanied by the depoliticization of the political elites. The withdrawal of the people from politics is read by the political elites as a signal that they too can withdraw from politics and may focus instead on exploiting the political mechanisms to further their private interests. Sheldon S. Wolin's concept of fugitive democracy, which is essentially a development of the Rousseauan critique of representation, should thus be expanded onto the political class which, uncontrolled by *demos*, privatizes politics to their own advantage and becomes a-political (Wolin, 2016, 100–114).

The privatization of the public sphere and the accompanying privatization of politics may be curtailed only by people re-entering politics. This happens when at some point someone realizes that politics has been abandoned both by the elites and the people and calls out to the people that nobody cares about the affairs of the community. Such an Althusserian interpellation may become

a moment of the return of the political, though the thus interpolated people wake up from their political slumber in protest and, having entrusted their fate to new leaders, fall back into a-political interpassivity again.

The mechanism of vicariousness, which brings about the depoliticization of the people is the breeding ground for authoritarianism and leads to the despotisation of politics. The psychological tendencies toward authoritarianism are well-known and amplified by the very structure of representative democracy. The representative to whom we delegate the task of taking care of the common good of the political community is thus endowed with an authority that has been discarded by ourselves. The phenomenon is prominent in the relationship of the people to the state but perhaps even more perspicuously at the level of local government, frequently eulogised as the essence of democracy. The degeneration of local governments into local despotisms is the most telling testimony of people's retreat from politics.

COGNITOCRATIC DEMOCRACY

The current discussion in the theory of democracy focuses on attempts to resolve the dilemma between the broad participation of the people in exercising power, and the deliberative ideal which assumes that power should be entrusted to people with appropriate cognitive competence. The theory of deliberative democracy, inspired especially by the work of Jürgen Habermas (1989 (1962)), was developed by Joshua Cohen (1989), Seyla Benhabib (1996), John S. Dryzek (2017), Robert E. Goodin (2008) and many others. Perhaps the most radical among them is Friedrich A. von Hayek's meritocratic project of curbing the instability of democracy by entrusting power to elites who, once elected, could not be deposed (Hayek 1978). The participatory democracy, outlined in the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Stuart Mill, finds contemporary defenders in Joel D. Wolfe (1985), Nancy Frazer (1990), Jacques Rancière (1999), Carol Pateman (2012), Sheldon S. Wolin (2016); Pierre Rosanvallon (2018), and others. A discussion of some of the above-mentioned works and conceptions can be found in Grygieńć, 2017).

If one defines democracy as the rule of the people by the people for the people, the dilemma between participation and deliberation, which organizes a significant part of contemporary discourse in the theory of democracy, looks like a dilemma between pleonasm and oxymoron. For if democracy is a political system based on popular rule, the term "participatory democracy" is a pleonasm: there is no popular rule without the participation of the people in government. "Deliberative democracy," in turn, especially in the cognitocratic sense, based on the rigid opposition between the cognitarian elite and the ignorant masses, bars the people from taking part in the exercise of power because it assumes that people lack the necessary cognitive abilities, and in this way becomes an elitist

negation of democracy. This view of democracy rests on the false Platonic assumption that those who know are to be endowed with power, and those deprived of knowledge are, by definition, fated to submission.

In most conceptions of deliberative democracy, the right to participate in power is seen as dependent on the knowledge possessed. They thus assume that democracy itself as a political system requires epistemological justification. Against this Richard Rorty provocatively argues that democratic politics should not be seen as

“subject to the jurisdiction of a philosophical tribunal—as if philosophers had, or at least should do their best to attain—knowledge of something less dubious than the value of the democratic freedoms and relative social equality which some rich and lucky societies have, quite recently come to enjoy” (Rorty, 1989, 196–197).

Even more strongly he claimed that democracy has a priority to philosophy and that democracy “can get along without philosophical presuppositions” (Rorty, 1991, 179).

The idea of deliberative democracy, which is a version of the cognitocratic model, is nowadays perceived as a more coherent and viable position. Yet even the participationists tend to view knowledge as a precondition to taking part in the governance of the political community. James Surowiecki argues in favour of broad participation in political power by questioning the effectiveness of the decision made by educated elites and advocates broad participation of non-specialists in the political decision-making process. He argues that if “you shrink the size of a decision-making body, you also shrink the likelihood that the final answer is right” (Surowiecki, 2015, 267). He believes that the wide participation of people generates an effect of synergy capable of producing wisdom which may not be available to narrow circles of expert elites despite their specialist knowledge. The source of knowledge necessary to successfully manage a political community is thus located by Surowiecki’s egalitarian argument on the side of the people, not the elites. Yet his participationist approach, based on the concept of the wisdom crowd, is also ultimately cognitocratic. Moreover, his conception is weakened even more by his belief in the political division of labour which resembles the one postulated by Plato. For example, Surowiecki writes:

“the point of a representative democracy is that it allows the same kind of cognitive division of labor that operates in the rest of society. Politicians can specialize and acquire the knowledge they need to make informed decisions, and citizens can monitor them to see how those decisions turn out” (Surowiecki, 2015, 266).

Despite the apparently inclusionary and participationist argument, his view acknowledges the inevitability of the representative democracy in which the wise rule and only consult the democratic rabble.

The advocates of mixed approaches, which combine the emphasis on the epistemic qualifications and widest possible social participation in political power, impose some preconditions on the participation which eventually turns out highly regulated and channelled through various intermediary forms, and ultimately supervised by people possessing specialist knowledge, competence and professionalism which is denied to the “simple” uneducated people. The proposed solutions to the dilemma between deliberation and participation, therefore, tend strongly toward the elitist, deliberative, epistocratic or cognitocratic model.

DELIBERATIVE EXPERTISE

The deliberationist approach is questionable and problematic for several reasons, some of which are mentioned below. The key concept in the deliberative model is expertise, even though the deliberationists are consistently vague both about the content of the idea and about their reasons for considering expertise more crucial than the will of citizens. We are warned that expertise should not be understood as “professional knowledge,” for example in the field of genetics, biotechnology, engineering, atomics, etc. The usefulness of such knowledge in managing a political community is an obvious banality, but this is not meant as expertise by the deliberationists. Political expertise is supposed to depend not on the breadth of knowledge, but rather on the “uniqueness” of the experts’ perspective.

Several arguments may be cited against the elitist cognitocratic or epistocratic model of democracy. The questionable status of the cognitocratic views may be demonstrated by pointing out the negative consequences of expertisation or even the professorization of politics. Though the formal status of a professor is commonly, and rightly, seen as an incontestable testimony of professionalism, competence, or expertise, it is also widely known that professorship is not tantamount to political expertise, indeed much to the contrary. There are multiple examples of professors who meekly put their expertise at the service of the capital or dictatorial regimes which, ironically, are usually led by personalities with no formally certified competence or professionalism, though are endowed with political skill. In both cases, such experts do so in the hope of winning for themselves goods of recognition, wealth, or both, displaying in this way the voluntary servitude diagnosed already in the 17th century by Étienne de La Boétie (1975). The servility, which unavoidably affects the objectivity of the experts’ expertise, is a strong argument against cognitocracy. Bismarck is credited with a well-known quip concerning the workings of the Hannoverian Parliament:

“Achtundachtzig Professoren: Vaterland, du bist verloren!” This statement, supported by the later experience of the parliament of the Weimar Republic, has won, not only in Germany, the status of incontrovertible wisdom which should suggest some restraint in assigning a political role to cognitive competence. Edmund Burke, an eminent political theorist and highly experienced political practitioner wrote that he had never encountered a plan that had not been improved upon by the insights of those who were far less intellectually capable than the person who led the work (cf. Popper, 1994, 3). An even older political authority, Pericles, said that while only a few can make policy, everyone is capable of judging it (Thucydides, 1974, II, 37–41). More generally, Douglas Adams argued that specialist knowledge of physical laws does not translate itself into the ability to catch a ball (Adams, 1987, 153–155). These records of practising politicians’ experiences suggest that cognitocracy as a political project is fundamentally flawed. Political history textbooks provide multiple examples of the risks implied in entrusting the power to smug cognitariate. Transposing the above observations to the sphere of politics one may say that even the certified knowledge of the laws of politics and society rarely translates itself into the skilful political management of societies, which is a compelling reason against the tyranny of epistemological merit (Sandel, 2020).

The argument on behalf of the elitist cognitocratic model and against the participatory one is not infrequently supported by a belief that the harm done by educated but misguided elites will be smaller than that inflicted on a political community if it were managed by the ignorant democratic crowd. The claim that the incompetence of professionals does not do particular harm to the political community they manage is neither a good nor sufficient legitimacy of the deliberationist position. The argument is disingenuous for it raises questions as to why power should be entrusted to professionals if they may turn out to be inept. The argument that blunders of the political elites are not harmful is not only controversial but also too poor support in favour of cognitocratic democracy. Indeed, no one has inflicted greater harm on multiple communities than professionals who thought their wisdom could not be equalled by anyone else. The expertisation of politics, in its managerial form, is well known for its disastrous consequences in many countries (Khalili 2022).

A more serious argument against the cognitocratic model challenges both the assumption of the necessity of knowledge to participate in politics and the assumption of the necessity to legitimize democracy. Adherents of cognitocracy do not pay sufficient attention to the fact that inequality in competence and expertise is often and perhaps usually a derivative of inequality in social and political status, and to the fact that democracy was established perhaps not only to combat and eliminate these inequalities, and to mitigate them, but to disregard them. The cognitocratic system turns out to be anti-democratic because it favours the perpetuation of the inequalities that gave rise to democratic systems and movements, and is therefore morally dubious.

Another issue that undermines the deliberationist position is that stressing the paramount importance of knowledge in politics tends to ignore extra-cognitive aspects of power, especially emotions in politics. Human emotionality is perceived as irrational, therefore obstructing efficient politics; that is why it needs to be curbed and repressed. What is overlooked here is that in politics emotionality that is repressed tends to return in a violent and turbulent manner. The disregard for the “emotional variable,” to use David Ost’s term (Ost, 2005; see also Chmielewski, 2009), makes the theory of politics incomplete and usually takes severe revenge in political practice. A picture of politics that ignores the emotional dimension of social life will necessarily be crippled because it is based on crippled philosophical anthropology that wrongly perceives emotions as both a troublesome and marginal aspect of humanity. In politics, not only knowledge plays a role, but also emotions, intuitions and moral abilities. Democracy cannot be understood without taking into account the power of emotions, non-discursive intuitions and strong moral judgments of citizens, both those of the governed and those in power. The belief that the volatility of political emotions may be sufficiently controlled rationally is overly optimistic and was repeatedly undermined. What is needed to control political emotionality is not specialist knowledge but rather, as testified by many examples in history, a political skill.

POWER OF THE PEOPLE

The relationship between deliberative and participatory models is often presented as a zero-sum game: more civic participation means less room for rational debate. A solution to the opposition between deliberation and participation is sometimes sought through designing hybrid conciliatory solutions inspired by the recognition of the dangers of uncritical trust in specialist knowledge, and the recognition of the existence of the category of “laymen-experts.” Such proposals to overcome the opposition by means of hybrid solutions resemble attempts to combine deliberative water with participatory fire. Conciliatory attempts to combine the deliberative and participatory perspectives are viewed with suspicion because the differences between these approaches seem unsurmountable (Grygień, 2017, 85). Such solutions could be credible were it not for the fact that they are still based on the distinction of citizens into *cognoscenti* and *indocti* and are, too, guilty of the cognitocratic fallacy.

The perception of problems in the exercise of power in democracies from the perspective of the dilemma between specialist expert deliberation and the popular participation of the people in the process of political decision-making leads to a dead-end street of cognitocracy in its elite or egalitarian version. The exercise of power, democratic or not, cannot be reduced to cognitive problems. It is about making decisions and carrying them out. Democratic governance is about

collective decision-making and its collective implementation. Cognitive competence is important, but political skill is essential. Fostering political skills in democratic systems is possible only through nurturing a sense of responsibility for the political community. Undoubtedly, the education of citizens of a democratic society can help to solve these problems. Yet the purpose will be served better through education of sentiments and the responsibility for the fate of one's community, which are integral parts of political skill.

One can thus say that the contemporary crisis of democracy is not the result of a lack of knowledge on the part of the people or the result of problematic competence and defective specialist knowledge of experts, nor is caused by ineffective management of public knowledge and preferences. The fundamental problem of democracy is not inadequate management of knowledge, but inadequate management of human emotions while its weakest point is that human emotions are most frequently managed through exciting fear and anxiety, and promising compelling if unrealizable visions of a prosperous future.

This issue is closely related to the questionable understanding of political participation as an organized and regulated activity. It is a proper place to invoke the concept of the radical agonist democracy which includes political activities that defy regularization. By agonism, I do not mean Isaiah Berlin's high-table version of dealing with incommensurable moral and political disputes (Gray, 1995). I rather mean Adam Ferguson's agonist democracy (Ferguson, 1995, 63–64). The agonist democracy encompasses such forms of political participation as demonstrations, strikes, riots, and violent uprisings, genuine though usually brief moments of the political reawakening of the people – authentic demonstrations of the power of the people which indeed can never be alienated.

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