

Grečo, P. (2015). Revolúcia, demokracia a masová kultúra. K antropologickým a politologickým aspektom filozofie Nikolaja Berďajeva. (Revolution, democracy and mass culture: To aspects of anthropology and political sciences of Nikolai Berdyaev's philosophy). Poprad: Vydavateľstvo Mornár a syn, 2015.

Peter Greco's monograph is dedicated to basic aspects of anthropology and political sciences of the Russian existentialist Nikolai Alexandrovich Berdyaev's philosophy. The author's interest in ideas of this existentialist was led by his belief in his ability of synthesizing ideas of anthropology and philosophy. Berdyaev is considered to be one of the most significant Russian philosophers, his work being enriched by a religious element, which draws him even greater importance. As the author himself states "in this monograph I tried to put together a synthesis of fundamental anthropological questions addressing socio-political topics within Slovak philosophical environment" (Grečo, 2015, p. 10).

The goal mentioned in the beginning of the book is aiming not only to create a synthesis of ideas of N. A. Berdyaev, but also to upgrade his visions and come up with innovative application frameworks of his ideas that can be applied in the 21st century, especially in fields of political theory and political philosophy as well as in cultural studies, using interdisciplinary approach in order for pluralism of mind and soul to occur.

His work "Revolution, democracy and mass culture" is conceptually divided into three parts. All of these parts had already been separately published by the author; however, he additionally developed them for the purpose of creating his latest piece of work. Together they form interconnected units containing individual ideas and thoughts.

The first part, bearing the name "Revolution and concept of a new man", analyzes starting points of the French bourgeois revolution (1789) and the Great October Socialist Revolution (1918) as an attempt of a birth of a new type of man as well as new social hierarchy. These revolutions set foundations for diverse, though in some aspects seemingly antagonistic political systems. They perceive people as sovereign individuals and power holders. People in French revolution are citizens with universal suffrage, while in the Russian revolution the term "people" considers only working people - workmen and farmers. Both of these revolutions share in common so-called "man-deity"

as opposite to “god-humanity”. Thus the measure of everything during and after revolutions is man.¹ Both Russian and French revolution are demanding to be claimed as “great”. As P. Greco describes Berdyaev’s conceptions, they are trying to put in use unlimited demands of man’s autonomy. He constructively analyzes both systems and suggests a question: How can democracy, liberal or socialist (totalitarian), lead through realization of general will principles in politics to either democracy or dictatorship? What’s fascinating about Berdyaev is that he described the Great October socialist revolution ten years before its beginning and he even managed to correctly presume that the ones to start it will be bolsheviks. Besides that, he was also right about elimination of freedom alongside with its anti-religious and anti-cultural nature. He claims it is a mistake to consider the French revolution the birth of parliamentary democracy. According to him it is “more likely a bud of parliamentary dictatorship rather than democracy” (Grečo, 2015, p. 22). Berdyaev’s perception of revolutions is negative. According to him “there weren’t any happy revolutions” (Grečo, 2015, p. 17). Despite this negative viewing of revolutions he also points out their ambivalence. They are an experience that both deprives and enriches man at the same time. “The deprivation itself is an enrichment” (Grečo, 2015, p. 26). Greco explains Berdyaev’s point of view on world’s permanent revolution through perspective that can only be provided by history. He is trying to understand the cultural revolution through eyes of other authors. In this part he is touching the political correctness, which he views as one of forms of lack of culture, fear, vagueness and tabooing of certain topics, even as part of slavery of illusion of awareness. He is also engaging in ideas of antagonism of this correctness and academic freedom or freedom of scientific research. As well as with changes, that the excessive correctness brings into communication ways (such as semantic collapse) of serious political problems.

In this part the author’s also engaging in consumerism and cult of culture of matter as problem of man’s emptying. He’s using this to counterpoise the freedom of spirit. The general level of culture in Euro-American civilization goes downhill and this civilization is becoming “antiquated”, where the gloss, high class and fame are only visible during visits of castles, palaces and museums. Culture is fattening. It is becoming more common, accessible and thus plebeian. Any moral trials and deep cognition of quandaries are rejected as long as it is below shallow surface. The passion for affluence

¹ In various parts both Greco and Berdyaev are pondering whether the man is aware of spiritual principles and connection of life and whether he can bring progress and positive change as revolution’s source.

is turning against itself. It's doubtful how to proceed to spirit's revolution, because as Greco writes: "Globalized western individualism and materialism in saturated society causes a noticeable decrease in interest of finding the purpose of human's existence and experience with God" (Grečo, 2015, p. 56).

In the second part of monograph bearing the name "Man in communistic and liberalistic context" the author builds on philosophical position of Berdyaev's existential personalism. He searches for answers to amount of freedom within communism in relation to individualism. Simultaneously he points out the problematic nature of transformation of international communistic ideas of Karl Marx into reality of then Russia through the Great October Socialist Revolution and its consequences. He comes to a conclusion that "marx-lenin" philosophy drastically changed the viewing of issues related to question of freedom and thus it is right to talk about it as of new viewing of this term. Berdyaev also subtly suggests that if the real socialism or rather communism is trying to disclaim religion, it is also disclaiming human and God's image within human. Communism built on solely materialistic foundations, suppressing nature of human beings. This leads the author Peter Greco to thinking about pseudoreligious ambitions of communism. He is playing around with a common belief that if it was not for communism banning religion and instead allowing people the freedom of religion, it would actually be a good system. However, in his opinion this is unrealistic as this particular system is anti-religious from its core. On top of that socialism is sort of presenting itself as a new religion. Greco rightly notes that Berdyaev's point regarding religious basis and sacralization of politics opens the gates of politics' exploration as a religious phenomenon and religion as political phenomenon". (Grečo, 2015, p. 74) He is enclosing his contemplations with idea that when it comes to communism, man can never be a brother to another man, only comrade. He is trying to analyze the truth and lie contained in communism, whereas Berdyaev himself states that this system contains such a mixture of both that one cannot be distinguished from another. Furthermore, the materialistic-monistic nature cannot be in accordance with the free spirit of mankind, on the contrary it oppresses it in a tyrannical way. Despite the fact that Russian Communism took over the Christian ideals of justice, it deprived them of their Christian dimension. Interesting is also the degree of self-reflection of Berdyaev, which Greco points out when pointing out that Christians themselves have done and still make a mistake if they are not trying to realize Christian social truth in any community. In the next section, individuality is contemplated. It stems from the idea that while political institutions inspired by communist

ideology flatten man into collectivism, liberal systems deny her the extreme individualism and atomisation of societies because their understanding of freedom is mechanical and fragmented. It points out the fact that “man-deity” humanism turns against man itself. (Grečo, 2015, p. 86) His contemplations lead to a “Declaration of rights of God and of the guarantee of the rights of man”, behind which stands the idea, that if you all will be aware primarily only of their rights and not obligations, then these rights will not be implemented. It should not be forgotten but remembered - as highlights Berdyaev through Greco, that human nature is an image of God. Thus, human rights must assume the rights of God, which are to be in the first council of the rights of God in man. Berdyaev proposes a “Declaration on the rights of the soul”. Analysis of freedom leads to the belief that freedom is an aristocratic category, which gives to the polemic the principles of liberalism. In his opinion, freedom is more of an aristocratic matter than democratic one. He continues to consider that the mere category of freedom has on the one hand, the holy trinity, and on the other deity-man basis. Interesting way points to the fact that Christ gave people freedom and that complicated the church’s ability to manipulate people. Complementing this idea, he states that the persecution for freedom of conscience is not a manifestation of the true followers of Christ, but the sin of the people. The church, according to the Berdyaev, is a space of freedom and while the state is the place of coercion. Of course, this creates tension between these two components. (Grečo, 2015, p. 104) And as Berdyaev himself adds, through Peter Greco: “The truth cannot withstand the slavish flattery “. In this context, it is necessary to explain that neither of these authors mistake freedom for free will, but instead bring attention to that fact. Positive and large-scale freedom is seen as a challenge to the Church by both of them. Greco suggests the question – how to find a solution for a positive definition and broad concept of freedom? And through the thoughts of Berdyaev along with his own conclusions he’s trying to find the answer through the viewpoint of thoughts - freedom comes solely from the Spirit. Whilst analyzing the functioning of society we must bear in mind that Christians should not veer away from social engagement, but instead should be active in trying to change the course of history. One of the subjects of the book is the Industrial Revolution, as significantly influenced and still influences the freedom of man. Berdyaev considers the most radical and largest revolution the invention of the machine, for it fundamentally changed the lifestyle of humanity’s existence to that point.

The third part of the book bears the name “Democracy as an empty shape”. It begins with a chapter called “Man in the crowd - the child of modern

democracy" (Grečo, 2015, p. 105). It criticizes crowd, its manifestation and negative impact on the functionality of liberal democracies. Crowd exhibits several characteristics that differ from ones that would constitute a summary of the characteristics and qualities of the individuals of which it is formed. In his constructive criticism the author is not leaving out leaders, which know, that the soul of the crowd is not driven by need for freedom, but, opposed to it, by a need for slavery. It is aptly added, that in the category of a crowd man does not belong only to plebs or ignorant people. Berdyaev warns against association of the masses and the crowd man only with the members of the working class. It may very much also include the exceptionally well educated and intelligent people. To finish painting the image of quality of democracy it is necessary to point out the pros and cons of public opinion, which the Slovak author did not forget. He briskly adds that public opinion polls "are rather pointless² constructs, which skilfully use statistical methods, reducing man on the mathematical figure in the game of political and economic interests" (Grečo, 2015, p. 127). Crowds are incapable of being in control of themselves, or guide their own existence, and hence they only cause social degradation.

The collapse of the bipolar system of the world on the end of the 20th century could have, according to Peter Greco, invoked a false impression that democracy and its principles as a system are universal. In the western civilizations nowadays, democracy is considered the only possible form of government. The author asks whether democracy is the optimal social political system when the individual basic blocks of democratic regimes (such as sovereignty and the will of the people, Rousseau social contract, the concept of a universally valid truth and according to the Berdyaev absurdities of the term "people" itself) had already been challenged by several theorists. This work and thoughts saturated chapter awakens a need to question the basic, seemingly unbreakable pillars of democracy. The introduction of the concept of political equality expressed through the universal suffrage, as we know it from the time of the Great French revolution, Berdyaev views as a mistake and as a part of the great political myth of the modern era. He claims that there is only one area where the absolute equality is needed and that's equality in front of law. He additionally considers this to be a guarantee of justice. The universal suffrage mentioned above can be, according to Greco, understood through mechanistic perception of equality as a path to tyranny. He views Dahl's statement that democracy prevents tyranny as overly confident. Democracy is only capable of "summing up the will of everybody,

² "pointless" as an opposite to "meaningful"

but not extracting the general will of people” (Grečo, 2015, p. 153). Thus fragmented society is unable to unite. This leads him to contemplation about who can rule most effectively. He comes to a conclusion that only those, who have the ability to control the awareness through campaign via media, are capable of such thing. These rulers are chosen by voters during the very short period in voters’ lives, so-called “sovereignty of people” period. He views democracy as “empty” and “groundless” term. “Democracy has only formal character, it doesn’t know its own content and according to its own principles it even does not have any. It only knows formal principle of expressing free will, which is valued over everything else and cannot be submitted to anything” (Grečo, 2015, p. 159). He also calls attention to irresponsibility of civil service regarding administration of common property in liberal democracy, where does not exist any personalized material responsibility as well as to ubiquitous corruption. However, he is not only critical. In fact, he appreciates democracy’s effort to express human’s autonomy, human rights and civil rights as well as freedom of man and his ability to manage his affairs. In this chapter Peter Greco forms his own concept of political sciences’ transit from horizontal democracy to vertical personalism, while he also describes three pillars of political system based on vertical personalism. He considers it as an alternative to up to now existing “horizontally-democratic concept”. According to his own words, his concept “surpass monism of democracy, including some of the historically verified principles from democracy, aristocracy and monarchy” (Grečo, 2015, p. 168).

The first monograph of Peter Greco about Nikolai Alexandrovich Berdyaev offers a synthesis of his own supporting social-political as well as culture-logical theses. He brings a new perception along with new conceptions following the message of this great Russian philosopher, which are surely a great contribution for political sciences of 21st century. In the public discourse in Slovakia is of this book written by Peter Greco spoken as of first of its kind within the Slovak Republic. Another additional value of the book is the fact, that it opens and re-defines older questions with innovative manner and also establishes new ones that are requiring to be answered. Taking all this into an account, the author presents a very valuable material regarding political sciences.

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