

BOOK REVIEW

Cyberdemocracy: Change of democratic paradigm in the 21st century.

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This is an engrossing book on a technology-driven evolution of democracy as a political system of organizing human communities. Using his broad knowledge of the political history of Europe and both Americas as well as his expertise in informatics and cybernetics, the Author develops a vision of the political system of the Information Society. The new system that is standing *ante portas*.

It is well known that the democracy began in the ancient Greece, where its *universe of discourse* was constituted by territorial communities of citizens. The principle of democracy says that the political decisions are to be made by all the members of the community. When the community is small, like an ancient Greek *polis*, we deal with the direct democracy. In the direct democracy all citizens of the polis are entitled to decide jointly in executive, legislature and judicial matters, and be appointed to various offices, either by voting or by lottery. For obvious reasons, the direct democracy was not applicable to large territorial communities, like states. Therefore, some 200 years ago the representative democracy appeared, as a result of Enlightenment. The representative democracy has been implemented in the contemporary parliamentary democracy, whose feature is that on behalf of all the citizens the power is exercised by a delegated representation, and the three kinds of power: executive, legislative and judiciary are separated from each other. An innate dilemma of these two forms of democracy, penetratingly observed already by J. J. Rousseau, is that the assembly of all citizens is impossible to corrupt, but easy to deceive, whereas representatives are hard to de-

ceive, because of their competence, but easy to corrupt. While the lack of knowledge can be compensated by educating people, it seems impossible to halt the corruptible. Furthermore, in contemporary parliamentary democracies, where the political power results from a struggle between political parties, two other negative factors appear beyond corruption: the political marketing and the political lobbying.

A remedy for the flaws of the representative democracy might be a novel variant of democracy, called in the book the cyberdemocracy. The Author observes that the today political problem situation is similar to what was seen at the beginning of the steamer or the automobile eras: the first steamers were just sailing ships fitted with steam engines, and the automobiles were merely horse carts equipped with engines. The thesis proclaimed in this book is that the representative democracy in the era of globalization triggered by the rapid development of information and communication technologies very much resembles that sailing ship occasionally powered by a steam engine. What is worse, the use of the advanced technologies even deepens the democracy flaws: the possibilities of manipulating the electorate and affecting the elected become unlimited. As a consequence, the appearance of a new democratic paradigm becomes a must. The cyberdemocracy, in contrast to the traditional democracy tied to a geographic territory, will develop in the cyberspace populated with virtual cybercommunities. A characteristic feature of a cybercommunity is that it is freely accessible and that all its members are in a position to permanently communicate with each other. The in-

teraction between cybecommunities is maintained by a hyperstructure. By presenting an expert description of new perspectives of exercising the political power opened out by the e-civilization, the Author argues that we are close to having enough technical means to introduce the cyberdemocracy as a modern form of the direct democracy. According to the vision unfolded in the book the cyberdemocratic political decisions make use of electronic communication, debating, and voting, fostering group work, exploiting group intelligence, data mining, forecasting, etc. Like in the ancient Greece, in the cyberdemocracy the executive, legislative and judiciary powers are

not be separated. The legislature evolves similarly to the development of open software. Appointments for executive functions are made by election or by lot, while selected executive organs function on the pattern of the shareholders executive bodies in corporations. In exercising the judiciary power off court solutions similar to the online dispute resolution are implemented, supported by e-justice.

The vision of change of the democratic paradigm in the Information Society set forth in this book might seem desirable or debatable, nevertheless it provokes reflection, and this is exactly what makes this book recommendable to a thoughtful reader.