

Democracia y empatía. El espacio que la habita, su progresión colectiva

Democracy and empathy. The space that inhabits it, its collective progression

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RESUMEN

La discusión filosófica que engloba la democracia del siglo XXI abarca un significado colectivo más profundo de lo que la palabra refiere en su definición singular. La democracia es una doctrina / sistema político / forma de gobierno popular donde el pueblo elige. Y es en la elección donde se generan vertientes de aproximación a una idea que intenta ser colectiva.

Este artículo usa el sentimiento de la empatía como rasgo unificador entre la democracia y su búsqueda ante la sensibilización colectiva. En su definición, la empatía es un sentimiento de solidaridad hacia una persona o grupo (RAE, 2019). La empatía observa las relaciones del ser humano, se vincula en comunidades, invierte en generar ciudad para el bien común y es parte inconsciente del desarrollo de la civilización (Rifkin J. 2010). Otro concepto importante a destacar es el espacio en el que se genera el desarrollo situacional o in-situ. El espacio delimita el territorio y en él convergen la historia, su cultura y el tiempo unido a las sensaciones. El espacio adquiere condiciones en función a necesidades, se manifiesta como resultado de éstas (Rifkin J. 2010) y permite, como producto de la experiencia, reconocer el lugar donde el desarrollo colectivo toma acciones. En este artículo el espacio y el lugar van de la mano, siendo el compromiso que delimita la experiencia en términos geográficos.

Los siguientes párrafos tienen como objetivo recorrer el camino de ida (Piglia G. 2015) hacia la comprensión de la democracia en un siglo donde los valores humanos buscan igualarse con una trascendencia espiritual, y donde los sentimientos son emociones activas que juegan en la colectividad. Espacios donde se pueden reconocer cuestionamientos propios y ajenos dentro de un espectro posible; donde son escuchadas ambas partes, diseminadas sin apropiación y vinculadas como opciones. ¿Será posible reconocer la verdad del otro como propia? ¿Puede el ciudadano del siglo XXI observar valores fundamentales como la solidaridad, honestidad y la escucha, y definir las como acciones progresivas para el desarrollo de la sociedad?

Palabras clave: ciudadano, democracia, empatía, espacio, solidaridad, valores.

ABSTRACT

The philosophical discussion that encompasses the democracy of the 21st century encompasses a deeper collective meaning than what the word refers to in its singular definition. Democracy is a popular doctrine / political system / form of government where the people choose. And it is in the election where approaches to an idea that tries to be collective are generated.

This article uses the feeling of empathy as a unifying feature between democracy and its search for collective awareness. In its definition, empathy is a feeling of solidarity towards a person or group (Rae, 2019). Empathy observes the relationships of the human being, is linked in communities, invests in generating the city for the common good and is an unconscious part of the development of civilization (Rifkin J. 2010). Another important concept to highlight is the space, in which the situational or in-situ development is generated. The space delimits the territory and in it the history, its culture and the time together with the sensations converge. The space acquires conditions based on needs, manifests itself as a result of these (Rifkin J. 2010) and allows, as producers resulting from experience, to recognize the place where collective development takes actions. In this article, space and place go hand in hand, being the commitment that defines the experience in geographical terms.

The following paragraphs are intended to go the one way (Piglia G. 2015) towards the understanding of democracy in a century where human values seek to be equated with spiritual transcendence and where feelings are active emotions that play in the community. Spaces where you can recognize your own and others questioners within a possible spectrum; where both parties are heard, disseminated without appropriation and linked as options. Is it possible to recognize the truth of the other as your own? Can the citizen of the XXI century observe relating fundamental values such as solidarity, honesty and listening, and define them as progressive actions for the development of society?

Keywords: citizen, democracy, empathy, space, solidarity, values.

Between adobe walls, in tents, hunters and trap setters rest after their daily chores. The city sleeps, as does the countryside. The living sleep in their time, and the dead in their time.

The old husband sleeps beside his wife, and the young husband beside his bride.

They all bow down to me, and I bow down to them. And as it is, being one of them, I am more or less myself. And from them, from each and all, I weave the song of myself.

An ode to myself
(Walt Whitman, 1892)

Democracy

Democracy is understood as something good, although it has not been universally accepted as such. Many of its defenders and detractors insist that it is difficult to find examples of real democracy. In this 21st century there are clear approximations but, often the "government of the people" is subordinated to the government of a particular sector of said people, excluding minority sectors and being a façade in favor of the power of vested economic interests (Krznaric R. 2014).

In the regional bubble that surrounds the island of Hispaniola, specifically the Dominican Republic, democracy is often equated with freedom. However, the ability to choose has been giving clear partial indications, based on the vision of a social group and encouraged by

high media of constant advertising, say Instagram and Facebook. On these platforms immediacy is the form; in them the actions of examples of activism, socialism, and humanity frame global concepts on a regional scale.

In the words of *Siri Hustvedt* "...I am convinced that we are witnessing the politics of humiliation" (The Guardian, 2018) and is that democracy, according to Greek etymology, comes from *demos* people and *kratos* power. In the definition of these two words, it can be understood that the power of decision and command is in the people who choose democratically; but how to choose democratically when we live in a society where lying is not a problem and where truth is subjective? How to develop democratic questions when the algorithm is biased by the number of likes? How to be a democratic activist in the XXI century when a photo is worth more than the action *per se*?

Framing the following paragraph in a play: if democracy is given a body and this is crossed with empathy, the resonance between gazes would be the only allegory. And the fact is that empathy is at the heart of real rationality and goes to the root of values, which are the basis of the sense of justice. Empathy is the reason for the principles of freedom, equity, and truth, which are necessary components of democratic justice.

It is important to emphasize the ability to listen, recognizing that diversity of thought is possible based on individual reflections. It is possible to have different opinions and principles. Diversity and equality have their origin in the recognition that all people should be treated with respect, regardless of where they come from.

The perspective of the "other" can never be as knowable as our own. Perspective is shaped by an individual's experiences and desires, and comparisons are inevitably with oneself: with a belief system and frame of reference that has been shaped by a series of usually geographical

factors (Levinas E. 2015).

Democracy itself is a particular way of being, a way of being with others. It has a lot to do in the approach with fellow human beings. "Do you respect them, do you recognize their dignity, can you identify your interest with theirs" (Whitman W. 1992).

Empathy

According to Jeremy Ruskin, civilizing equals empathizing. The author uses the term to relate sensitivity and awareness to the empathic nature; he says that "civilization is made complete in its meaning by the development of empathy over time.

That is why empathy can undoubtedly be cultivated throughout life and used as a radical force for social transformation.

In a study by philosopher *Roman Krznaric*, he explains that the big buzz about empathy stems from a revolutionary change in the science of how we understand human nature. The old view that human beings are essentially selfish creatures is being pushed firmly aside by evidence that they are also a continuous outcome of *homo empathicus*, which is wired for empathy, social cooperation, and mutual aid (*Krznaric R. 2014*).

You never really understand another person until you consider things from their point of view, until you get inside their skin and walk in their shoes.

(Lee H. 1988).

Giving context to the term empathy; this is argued by many critics that there is a problem in the fact that Darwin used the term sympathy to describe the evolutionary foundations of the moral sense. However, since the word empathy would not be invented in English until the early 20th century, it is the meaning with which Darwin uses the word that ultimately matters more than the word itself. The evolution of "Darwinian sympathy" into the empathy we

know today was not reflected until after World War II (Darwin, C.R. 1871).

Edward Titchener, a student of the German philosopher and psychologist, is credited with first translating the term *Einfühlung* as empathy in 1908 and discussed it in greater detail in a lecture on the Experimental Psychology of Thought Processes in 1909 (Titchener E.B. 1909).

However, the earliest known use of empathy in English comes from an 1895 article in *The Philosophical Review* by Lawrence Hinman, referring to a writing by *Kurd Lasswitz* entitled *Ueber psychophysische Energie und ihre Factoren*, on psychophysical energy and its factors (Johnson E. 2017); explaining that psychophysical energy is defined as the ratio of all energy in any change of the central organ to intensity. In plain words, the energy changes around the intensity and this may be due to the *habitational* recognition of where this has been generated.

In that article *Lasswitz* (1895) explains empathy as a physical quantity, a physiological brain function, and as a ratio of all energy in any central organ change effected with intensity (Johnson E. 2017). That is, empathy can be felt. It is an action with consciously generated physical reflexes.

Giving context to empathy, studies have been found where they narrate how the empathic relationship is linked to the history of civilization. This can be explained according to five branches of study (*Rifkin, J. 2010*):

1. Biology: The empathic act is witnessed by feeling, not thinking. It is an innate act. This concept may be based on *Lasswitz's* principles explained above.

2. Education:

Emotional intelligence, character and the development of critical thinking are reinforced. The collaborative learning

experience is emphasized.

3. The Law: Rather than sentencing, it seeks to create awareness in terms such as truth, compassion, forgiveness, reflection, and social integration.

4. Economy: Win-Win concept. Sharing the risks and cooperating together

5. Environment: Disorder in sympathetic mass, concepts of entropy and reflexes of large energy expenditures.

To imagine today's Dominican society within these principles would seem so radical that it is even difficult to recreate it mentally. Empathy is simply the fact of understanding and vicariously experiencing another person's experience. However, recognizing actions based on the common good because of innate knowledge is not usually the first reaction.

Consciously human beings can experience empathy and selfishness at the same time.

Can empathy then be the hidden engine of human history?

Space

Rather than highlighting space in its definition and what it entails, this article seeks to represent the hope that dwells within the experience of an empathetic democracy. Undoubtedly there is a destiny beyond our space and survival as a species.

The authenticity of what I have discovered about myself is reinforced because I have seen reaffirmed something of me in you and you in me.

(*Kwok-Bun C. 2012*).

Spatially, in everyday territories, most arguments are based on a false dichotomy between empathy and reason.

The reason why it is understood that all people should be treated equally is because

empathy opens up moral concern for neglected or marginalized social groups and this then has repercussions within rights and laws (Lakoff, G. 1980).

Collective Evolution

Creating an analogy of all the concepts used above, it can be said that space is made around the collective response. The reality is that collectively we are wired to feel empathy, it is part of our nature and it is the material and physical basis that allows us to be social beings.

Daily life is certainly full of suffering, stress, injustice, and low blows, but in the main it is positively counterbalanced by small acts of kindness and generosity.

Mutual compassion and comfort are always creating benevolence, weaving the social bond.

(Rifkin J. 2010).

It may be that resolving the contradiction between empathy and democracy is the challenge within evolution as a human species.

Conclusion

We can reflect on the fact that if democracy is the very expression of the people where the common good and welfare are sought, how and where does collective reason and human feeling

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come together? To what extent is the suffering of the other part of the democratic exercise?

Empathy is undoubtedly an ennobling and comforting act. It is loaded with a great deal of human dignity, not only in its definition but also in its action. It does not feel an iota of individual stirring that does not have the collective good as an end.

Today, the relationship between the self and others has repercussions for the whole. Therefore, by acquiring a deep sense of identity, empathy can be generated, allowing one to explore the mystery of consciousness and discover new realms of meaning. Being empathic gives purpose to the individual in his or her collective, in his or her space and in the inner mystery we project.

Such mystery is called imaginative empathy (Didion J. 1961), a test of the will to be. Liberation from the expectations of others is where the great singular power of self-respect lies. One does not run away to find oneself and find no one at home... one is singular thanks to the collective and vice versa; one is truly democratic thanks to the understanding of empathy.

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