

## Open Weltanschauung to Build a Democratic Behavior: the Actuality of Mannheim's Thought

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# *Open Weltanschauung to Build a Democratic Behavior: The Actuality of Mannheim's Thought*

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## **Abstract**

This essay pieces together some key theoretical issues from Karl Mannheim's democratic model and draws the attention to how, according to the author, democratization requires a collective cultural dimension linked to an open *Weltanschauung*. Subsequently, it presents the need to enhance a personal dimension for a development of a *democratic behavior* and shows how this latter behavior is an attempt to cope with ambiguities and limits that lead to the degeneration of democracy, in *historysharp turns*. In conclusion, it will argue that the concept of democratic behavior can contribute to addressing other urgent needs of past and present society.

Keywords: Democratic Behavior, Karl Mannheim, worldviews.

## **Introduction**

We often talk about individualized society and the crisis of democracy, which lead to populist drifts. With this paper, according to Karl Mannheim's concepts, I would like to point out that both issues can be influenced by a cultural process. In particular, it will be clarified that the change of *Weltanschauung* leads both to a crisis of society and to the development of possible solutions such as *democratic behavior* or *authoritarian behavior*. Indeed,

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*Weltanschauung* influences cultural patterns as well as individual behavior and social processes including democratization<sup>1</sup>.

First of all, in the essay it is noted that a *Weltanschauung* - a prerequisite to shaping a worldview - is always open: we can infer it both when Mannheim outlines the partial nature of the knowledge which is implementable, and when he describes the concept of relationism with which he seeks a relationship between individual points of view and the search for a shared truth (Mannheim, 2000). It is this condition of openness which allows the flow of cultural processes, and hence the prevailing of different behaviors: democratic or subservient, for instance. Later on, the paper describes the process of democratization of society with a presentation of Mannheim's 'constellation' that revolves around equality, individual autonomy and characteristics of leadership (Santambrogio, 1998). Finally, the concept of *democratic behavior* will be introduced in order to draw the attention to its function of promotion of participation in the model of democratic society: its characteristics will be analyzed and, after a description of the peculiarities of social disintegration (Mannheim, 1950) in the past and present society, its validity as a tool will be highlighted to promote the idea of *homo civicus*.

### **The open *Weltanschauung*: a precondition for the shaping of worldviews and for a *democratic behavior***

According to Mannheim, a democratic society is formed in a specific cultural context, based on the *Weltanschauung* of the time, which provides a basis of meaning for the development of individual and collective knowledge. *Weltanschauung* could be conceived as a primordial soup, from which both the specific theoretical views (such as science) and the a-theoretical views (such as art and religion) are shaped; it provides an existential guideline to the thinking activity, by intertwining knowledge and interpretation of experience; it gives practical meaning to people's lives; it gives them existential directions - of which they could be more or less aware - which can be found in the social and historical environment they live in; it becomes a starting point and a *fil rouge*. According to Loredana Sciolla (2000: VIII) "we are acknowledging the fact that the individual often inherits a situation in which there are already thinking patterns that they have retrieved and further processed"<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In Mannheim's work, there was always a concern toward this aspect. This was due also to his personal history, which had him confronting the fascists and Soviet totalitarian regimes, which he considered a degeneration of democratic society (Canta, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> The author has translated the quotes from texts published in Italian.

The *Weltanschauung* is the background and a precondition for the shaping of ideologies and utopias, which implies a choice of direction in a vision of the society in which individuals live. As noted by Tamas Demeter (2012: 50): “Ideology can thus be understood as a rationalized formulation of some pre-theoretical and non-conceptual worldview”<sup>3</sup>. The essay on generations offers an example of what is meant here: generational bond – which indicates everything that the same generation expresses, feels, understands and knows on the basis of its ‘generational location’- is placed at a *Weltanschauung* level, while the ‘generational units’ opt for different choices of field, therefore placing themselves at ideology and utopia levels<sup>4</sup>.

*Weltanschauung* is located in the *pre-scientific* and *pre-cultural* realm, if with culture we mean processing experiences, values or theories within a socio-historical structure. To Mannheim, it is the spirit of the time and it penetrates the depth of individual and collective consciousness, but it is not understandable with logical or philosophical thinking and not even religions and the arts can express it completely, whereas they are all inspired by it. The sociologist writes that *Weltanschauung* “is concerned, however, it belongs to the realm of the a-theoretical in a still more radical sense. Not only that it is in no way to be conceived of as a matter of logic and theory; not only that it cannot be integrally expressed through philosophical theses or, indeed, theoretical communication of any kind in fact, compared to it, even all non-theoretical realizations, such as works of art, codes of ethics, systems of religion are still in a way endowed with rationality, with explicitly interpretable meaning, whereas *Weltanschauung* as a global unit is something deeper, a still unformed and wholly germinal entity” (Mannheim, 1952: 41).

*Weltanschauung* in Mannheim is structurally open: it is demonstrated by two elements. First of all, by the partial nature of knowledge; in fact, following the path of the different layers of meaning<sup>5</sup>, the documentary<sup>6</sup> level is never

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<sup>3</sup> *Weltanschauung* is different from ideology and utopia because it provides the “ingredients” to produce worldviews, while the first and the second require the choice of a preferred option, which is also socially conditioned.

<sup>4</sup> As Merico (2012) observed, the generational unit defines a choice of field within a critical position which is shared by a group of individuals. It plays a “socializing function” that allows the “formation a collective will”.

<sup>5</sup> According to Mannheim (2000), there are three layers of meaning; objective meaning, expressive meaning, and documentary meaning.

<sup>6</sup> “Unlike the two other types of interpretation, documentary interpretation has the peculiarity that it must be performed anew in each period, and that any single interpretation is profoundly influenced by location within the historical stream from which the interpreter attempts to reconstruct the spirit of a past epoch” (Mannheim, 1952:61).

complete; during its elaboration, we are required to be open to integrate and restate the level of understanding reached; the cognitive process is not increased by a mere sum of the parts, but by the consistent systematization of the information newly discovered or acquired, and by the rearranging of the cognitive structures, especially when both the object and subject of knowledge are dynamically changing (Mannheim, 2000). Within the documentary interpretation, integration follows three criteria: coherence between each singular phenomenon and the whole; adequacy to the *Weltanschauung*, that is to say, if the interpretation is near 'the spirit' as a whole; and translation, when interpretations are in contrast: less adequate but correct interpretations should be maintained with regard to their significant parts. This way, the process of knowledge is open, it meets the *Weltanschauung* of the time and renews it.

Another indication that describes the open *Weltanschauung* is the relationship between singular elements and totality: "we have to get rid of this way of looking at things, and to show how each fragmentary unit is already encased in a universe of interpretation whenever it is grasped as such this universe prescribing the pattern according to which all further units have to be fitted into the picture as it is being rounded out" (Mannheim, 1952: 69). The proposal of relationism itself to overcome relativism reveals the choice to avoid a research for truth in solitude and the awareness of imperfection of the ideas, of the theories, of the definitions that can be always questioned. Actually, relationism<sup>7</sup> becomes an instrument for measuring, verifying, comparing and overcoming different ideologies<sup>8</sup>, total or partial ones, inside the *Weltanschauung* of an age. Indeed, relationism can "unmask"<sup>9</sup> the claim to absoluteness of many ideologies and, at the same time, can indicate their partiality, favoring an integration of ideas: "relationism does not mean that standards for truth do not exist, but that every assumption is understandable in connection with the others" (Canta, 2006: 22).

Collective cultural dimension and personal dimension are connected and it is important that individuals acknowledge it. The awareness of one's own conditioning becomes essential to prevent absolutizing one's own certainties: "thought is conditioned by the socio-historical situation in which it was

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<sup>7</sup> Technique of sociology of knowledge as reported by Karl Mannheim: relationism includes criteria for the verifiability of the statements, but they are only valid when in relation to their bearings upon the context, not in an absolute way; furthermore, it differs from relativism because it suggests an integration of perspectives through increasingly broader elaborations.

<sup>8</sup> Provided the parts are open to discussion.

<sup>9</sup> For more information concerning the concept of unmasking in Mannheim (Baher, 2013).

conceived, the kind of thought that neglects its dependency upon external circumstances becomes a false consciousness” (Canta, 2006: 19). As Remmling (2015: 50) writes: “Contemporary men cannot go behind social reality, which is the vital center of all their experiences, and they must interpret all psychic-intellectual manifestations of life as dependent upon social positions and changing socio economic orders”. The models of thought are characterized by the intertwining of knowledge and existence; they are both crucial for the building of society, and this interpretation is important in times of change.

*Weltanschauung* is a precondition to all the possible visions of the world in its openness, in its double dimension, collective and individual, logical and a-theoretical: they all characterize a social system and are the nourishment to operative ideas, i.e., those models of action and thought characterizing a life style and a behavior (Mannheim, 1950). From these operative ideas, models of behavior and personality which are functional or critical towards society, will take shape<sup>10</sup>: authoritarian or fundamentalist in the case of totalitarian regimes; anarchic or competitive in the case of systems inspired by liberalism<sup>11</sup>. This implies that democratic society should foster behaviors which are functional or critical toward itself; behaviors that can either contain the temptations of total ideologies or soften the rigidity of partial ideologies<sup>12</sup>.

If *Weltanschauung* influences both the vision of the world and behavior, then the democratization process will have to be in close connection with *democratic behavior*, otherwise, in the best case scenario, there will be an incomplete model, and, in the worst one, there will be a degeneration<sup>13</sup>.

### **The democratization of society**

If the social structure and the ideal style of behavior interact with each other, then a society which becomes democratic should promote the image of a “new man”, and, to make it possible, we need to favor the implant of elements in the *Weltanschauung*, because, as Canta (2006: 144) remarks, “it is necessary to develop a personality which is balanced and coherent with the

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<sup>10</sup> In this case here, we could draw a parallel with what Mannheim calls generation units.

<sup>11</sup> We could add “individualized” as Beck (2013) describes them, and “narcissistic” as they are portrayed by Cesareo and Vaccarini (2012).

<sup>12</sup> This would be more relevant to our time which has been classified as the society of tribes (Maffesoli, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Degeneration could affect a *Weltanschauung* as well, because it is a system open to changes and, therefore, can be influenced by models of society and lifestyles under development.

spirit of real democracy". To understand the centrality of *democratic behavior*, we should describe the characteristics of the democratic model originating, according to Mannheim, from the combination of the enlightenment, romanticist, positivist and historicist cultural streams.

The process of democratization is an irreversible trait in the historical development of Western societies; even the dictatorial drifts – which took place under Nazi-Fascist or Soviet Socialist totalitarian regimes – were caused by the implosion of democracy, as a result of the passing from a first stage, in which relatively homogeneous social strata were involved, to a second stage, in which the masses were involved thanks to the introduction of the universal suffrage. These very drifts would actually confirm a democratic *Weltanschauung* in the society<sup>14</sup>.

In its *The Democratization of Culture*<sup>15</sup> Mannheim (1952) offers a critical analysis of the cultural process characterizing the democratic phase of his time, and argues that the process is not limited to the political sphere, but it extends to the cultural sphere and to the modalities of the relationship towards the others. The analysis illustrates what Mannheim would call "constellation" of the phenomenon, recognizable in its three main stars<sup>16</sup>: equality, autonomy of the individual, selection and democratic culture of the *élites* (Santambrogio, 1998).

The first star is represented by the awareness that all human beings are equal. Mannheim explains that within a principle of equality it is no longer possible to accept a vision of power limited to a higher authority, assigned to an *élite* which presumably has a higher essence. The concept of equality that democracy brings to the political field opens a new relationship with culture. The aristocratic vision presumes predestination, and values exceptional talents among educated people, while democratic culture explains the difference between people in terms of contingencies (a person received a better education than another one) rather than in terms of essence (a person has a better predisposition than another one). Henceforth a dynamic interpretation of man, in replacement of the static one, is introduced. There are no longer 'predestined ones', but everybody can 'learn'. In the democratic vision, the

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<sup>14</sup> Totalitarian drifts belong to this *Weltanschauung* and therefore are destined to decay, in time.

<sup>15</sup> An essay published posthumously in *Essay on the sociology of the culture*. In the presentation of the volume Ernest Mannheim believes that the three essays here contained (*Toward on the sociology on the mind; an introduction; The problem of intelligentsia. An inquiry into its past and present role*; and finally *The Democratization of the culture*) were written by Mannheim during his last year in Germany.

<sup>16</sup> To identify them, Mannheim uses the method of the comparison with the previous society models, in particular with that of the aristocratic society.



idea of learning rejects the concept of an assumed knowledge, requires clarity and seeks for simplicity: “the democratic mind [...] accepts as truth only that which can be ascertained by everybody in ordinary experience, or that which can be cogently proved by steps that everybody can reproduce” (Mannheim, 1952: 184). In the democratic society the empirical form of knowledge prevails as well as the search for impersonal institutions, in order to involve the widest variety of people, whereas there is the tendency to underestimate the qualitative features. The relationship between equality and accessibility of education, on the one hand, implies a citizens’ commitment to engage in the process of learning and information, and on the other hand, tends to homologate people and to annihilate the differences that, instead, are a distinctive trait of social identities.

The second star is the autonomy of the individuals, as social units. Democratization allows open spaces of action and choice. After Kant, explains Mannheim (1952: 189), individuals are free in their thought as well as in their cognitive action; “its essence is the assertion of the original spontaneity and creativity of the epistemological subject and of the act of cognition”. When autonomous individuals increase in number, a new perspective of knowledge opens up, because more people are able to express their spontaneity and creativity.<sup>17</sup> However, if individuals use their vital energy in an autonomous way, it becomes crucial that we understand how to contain - without repressing it- the strength of their activities, which will be centrifugally driven away from an ideal social gravity center.<sup>18</sup> Now we can deduce two elements: one concerning the acceptance of the laws and the other concerning solidarity. The first one requires consensus from the majority of the citizens to approve laws, because laws have been chosen and not given *a priori*; the author remarks that the search for truth in a democratic society is developed through free discussion and its arena of confrontation is the “universal reason” embedded in every person; moreover – adds Mannheim – given that for a democratic mind there are no prejudices, all the initial standpoints will start from the same level and will be considered plausible; any conclusion will be reached together and under agreement;

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<sup>17</sup> Mannheim, here, claims that in periods of significant changes, new social groups emerge politically, which stimulate individuals to form their viewpoints.

<sup>18</sup> It is indeed in autonomy - which requires from an individual both a great sense of responsibility and an important degree of participation in the decisional processes - that Mannheim finds one of the elements of ambivalence that can lead to a democratic collapse. There is, *de facto*, the risk of a self-absolving delegation that leads to mass democracy, which is, in turn, the first step towards the rise of populism and authoritarian groups of power.

finally, all the laws are always verifiable and revisable. This would make democracy fluid and always open<sup>19</sup>. The second element takes into consideration the non-automatic aspect of solidarity in a society that values individual autonomy. Individuals, in fact, will tend to take no interest in the destiny of others and, at the same time, will tend to isolate themselves. This aspect, in a mass democracy, weakens the individuals and strengthens the social groups that hold power. They will be inclined to condition other individuals through propaganda, depriving them of their freedom. A democratic *Weltanschauung* should be able to soften “systemic” drifts without smothering the criticism coming from minority groups - which the principle of majority tends to crush. Mannheim indicates a strategy to mitigate the harmful and indirect effect of autonomy: the action of the small communities. These small communities should put individuals in charge of their relationships with others and arouse their interest in shared choices. These groups which today we would call civil society actors, will have the ability to activate the participation of individuals so as to overcome massification and limit the influences of propaganda. This way, different social groups should understand that “educating the mass in reality-oriented ways of thinking, that is, a real democratization of the mind, is the paramount task at the stage of fully developed democracy” (Mannheim 1952: 199).

The third star consists of selection and democratic culture of the *élite* – *élite* groups should, in fact, consider themselves part of the mass-population rather than alien to it. Its peculiar element, when compared to the other models, is the distance perceived between leader and people. Democratization consists in the reduction of distances. According to Mannheim, from a cultural point of view the process of self-perceived “de-distantiation” (approach) between *élites* and mass is central<sup>20</sup>. Social distance in relationships reveals the degrees of intimacy in people’s behaviors and the balance of power due to hierarchy and inequality (vertical distance). There are, in addition, cultural distances among groups or individuals which induce them to attribute different meanings to the same objects<sup>21</sup>. Vertical distance, in the author’s opinion, has the most influence on the others. Mannheim (1952: 240)

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<sup>19</sup> An aspect that - remarks Mannheim - could apparently show democracy weaker than other systems, while instead, proves it capable of withstanding the changes.

<sup>20</sup> Contemporary culture tends to deny the distance in the relationships and in the cultural field, and tries to overcome distinctions like holy and profane, high and low, explains Mannheim.

<sup>21</sup> This latter distance is defined ‘existential’ and consists of cultural structures, which draw the boundaries of the meaning of a language, the comprehension of which defines who is inside or outside a group, for example.

writes “Dominating the lower groups is not merely a matter of giving orders and enforcing obedience. It consists, to a very large extent, in the maintenance of vertical distance which became an organic part of thinking, not only of rulers but also the ruled”.

Social distances create non-communicant worlds<sup>22</sup>. Mannheim believes that criticism towards the *élite*<sup>23</sup> is favored by the advent of analytic thinking which deals with examining matters from the inside and has ousted morphologic thinking, which, conversely, looks at matters from the outside<sup>24</sup>. The distance that exists in democracy is impersonal, the authority is delegated to the individual in a temporary and limited way; on the other hand, institutions are mythicized: the elections of people's representatives or constitutions, for instance; another kind of outdistancing is the abstraction of certain concepts: state, party, class<sup>25</sup>. In comparison, pre-democratic distance places concrete people and concrete groups in inaccessible spaces, while the democratic distance personifies and hypostatizes abstract entities. This will facilitate the formulation of different and contrasting ideologies and utopias. Furthermore, if hierarchies are eliminated, changes are encouraged also in the cognitive process: any object has equal importance and so has every experience. This, however, introduces an element of difficulty; here, Mannheim (1952: 226) introduces the problematic relation between equality and individual identity: “if the field of experiences is homogeneous, if no object is respected above any other, how can man himself, the individual unit of society, claim any particular dignity?”.

Another matter concerning the *élite* is about the type of education which is acceptable. Mannheim highlights that, in society, traditional humanistic and democratic ideals are in contrast, and draws a line between aristocratic and democratic education. Humanistic culture and education tend to become isolated and do not affect a wider mass, even if their ideals contain essential elements for a full and rich life<sup>26</sup>. The author shows that there are new cultural

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<sup>22</sup> An example indicated by Mannheim is the language misunderstanding between the common man and the aristocrat.

<sup>23</sup> We find a first authoritative example of this in Machiavelli who deconsacrates power. Differently from Renaissance, the democratization process extends the possibility of criticism to all the people.

<sup>24</sup> The analytical approach tends to “unmask” the image of mythicized institutions, everything is reduced to observable facts, the rest is treated like ideologies in the debate among the different groups of power.

<sup>25</sup> The combination between the critical analytic approach and the distance created by myth and abstraction creates ambiguity in democratic thinking.

<sup>26</sup> Mannheim identifies five limitations: 1. One's own field is confused with the world itself: the liberal grasps deep sense and subtlety in meaning, but neglects to

aspirations in democratic ideals. Firstly, there is the idea of a specialization of the vocation: man can be understood only within his practical objectives. The emphasis here is on a concrete situation. Thinking becomes pragmatic and there is the tendency to talk about what is known through experience. Secondly, politics are viewed as a specific vocation. When politicians represent the interests of part of the mass, they need specialized knowledge; thirdly, the essence of education for a professional is learning in the best possible ways about his specific position. Specializing means connecting different fields and interests according to a point of view. They start from the immediate experience to reach a structured vision of reality. Here, the question of an orientation of meaning arises, since the specialized vision given by the democratic model does not seem to tackle it.

The limit of democratic education is its transcendental dimension and the reflection on the ultimate values, which are a distinctive trait of a human being. Mannheim proposes a new kind of ascesis which is formed through the experience, in the relationships between “I and object”, “I and Thou”, “I and self”. In the first case, thinking is congruent with doing. Nonetheless, knowledge cannot be reduced to the technical explanation of the world; in the second case, since all the distances tend to level, all the individuals will be interchangeable and the “other” will have an instrumental role. This, however, leads to unmask people and see them the way they are. In the third case, an individual considers himself and his aspirations on the basis of the search for autonomy. Mannheim believes that the tendency to minimize vertical social distances favors the development of an inner personality: the modern age proposes a disenchanted reality where man can be himself without being entrapped in his social status. As a counterpart, this could result in a self-closure that would lead to a narcissistic drift (Cesareo, Vaccarini, 2012). This means that one should give up his own certainties and social conditioning in order to direct himself to a new stage of *more genuine human true*. In the democratic model the individual is stranded out on the high sea. According to

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consider basic facts. 2. The contact with the simple reality of life is absent. In this case education can be the main objective only for people who do not face the day to day challenge of the precariousness of existence. 3. Merely aesthetical relations with the things are established. The cult of Art for Art's sake becomes distant from social life and incomprehensible to people. The social arena requires a sensible message from art. 4. The oblivion of personal, biographical and contingent history in the analysis of creations. There is a preference for work of art *per se*, and work does not appear as the result of a life. 5. The aversion towards what is dynamic and unexpected. The search for harmony tends to do without human potential. There is a consistent reference to classical standards that confine potentialities and provide a ready-made model.

Mannheim, (1952: 246) “insecurity as a general destiny, no longer limited to submerged strata, is one of the characteristics of the modern age”.

The description of the three indicated dimensions shows the deep involvement of people, the citizens, in the democratic model, which requires a reformulation of their behavior from them. Furthermore, we can find weaknesses and ambiguities, which Mannheim emphasizes in order to bring improvements to the model: firstly, the risk of equality without differences, which homologates individuals; secondly, the excess of autonomy, which crushes solidarity connections and tends to isolate individuals making them more “conditionable by propaganda”; thirdly, an analytic education tied to praxis but lacking in transcendence and, hence, incapable of producing a reflection on the ultimate values, which leads to a condition of consistent insecurity.<sup>27</sup> In a later work, the author will add two more limits to these ones: one due to the excessive resort to compromises, which would lead to both neglecting the discussion on the fundamental principles (Mannheim, 1950) and to developing neutral politics based on the acceptance of operative actions; the other one, connected to the previous one, would be an atmosphere of general indifference in which morals, religion and historical perception remain external attitudes without essential elements<sup>28</sup>.

To cope with these limits, the Hungarian sociologist proposes democratic planning for freedom.<sup>29</sup> The proposal is an attempt to reconcile the people's autonomy with a balanced development of consensus, based on the planning of the objectives, which has to be public and participated by the citizens; according to the author planning should be aimed at equality and social justice criteria, to help the process of de-distantiation. In addition, “planning for Mannheim means taking people away from any mechanism of manipulation, including the concealed one typical of present-day society” (Canta, 2006: 106). In his proposal, Mannheim elaborates the concept of *democratic behavior* which will be an essential part, since it highlights the cultural roots of this model among people.

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<sup>27</sup> And we could continue the analysis on self-closure *a posteriori*.

<sup>28</sup> It can be noted that while listing these limits, there emerge the dimensions that Mannheim underlines when describing the concept of social disintegration in a society in crisis, and that will be later discussed in this work.

<sup>29</sup> The third way in response to absolute liberalism and totalitarianism: a matter that we will not analyze in this essay; for more information, we will refer to other studies, see Canta 2006 and Remmling 2015. A criticism of the third way is the lack of reconciliation between the planning for objectives and an open mind to what is new and to the independence of the individuals.

### **The *democratic behavior* for the “new man”**

We will now focus on the concept of *democratic behavior*, because we believe it can offer a contribution also to the present-day social context, as we will try to clarify later in this essay.

If the democratic society revolves around the three coordinates described – equality, autonomy, de-distantiation between *élite* and represented citizens – it requires a “new man” capable of crossing the boundaries of his social status, capable of thinking in terms of equal dignity among people, capable of appreciating the cultural/political relationship between represented and representatives. Such society, therefore, should hold in itself the potential to let people grow open towards constant changes and in incessant search for a common regulatory code. The sociologist proposes an optimistic approach to man<sup>30</sup> and, as previously mentioned, aims at his autonomy<sup>31</sup>, in order to free him from social, cultural and psychic elements of inhibition; aims at exploiting his creative potential, in order to promote a culture of critical analysis in contrast with a traditional humanistic culture; and pursues an education based on human needs rather than authoritarian punishments. Mannheim (1950: 211) writes: “democratic education is triumphant not only in the exhortation to be constructive or spontaneous, but in planning the life of the individual so that it presents a constant challenge to initiative, to making one’s own choices, to finding new combination, to remaining self-possessed and swimming against the current for a while, if necessary”.

The essential characteristics of *democratic behavior* find lifeblood in the democratization process<sup>32</sup> and represent an attempt to cope with the limits and the ambiguities of democratic society such as the centripetal force of autonomy, the tendency to massify opinions and the difficulty in finding efficient and efficacious mediations between different groups of interest. Mannheim identifies four characteristics of *democratic behavior*, deduced from a comparison with the despotic authoritarian model: willingness to cooperate, mutual respect, reduced use of violence, and integrative behavior, which is the

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<sup>30</sup> Mannheim, in his observations, underlines the importance of psychology and psychoanalysis in emphasizing: a) the role of super-ego which inhibits anti-social instincts, and builds positive ideals; b) the proposal of a socialization which issues positive images rather than just prohibitions; c) the potential of proposing shared objectives for a common purpose; d) stimuli to creative impetus and to self-improvement.

<sup>31</sup> In this case, Mannheim is referring to *Émile* by Rousseau in which the elimination of the obstacles which condition children’s education is invoked.

<sup>32</sup> They are described by Mannheim in the posthumous work, *Freedom, Power and Democratic Planning* (Mannheim, 1950).

real cornerstone supporting all the other characteristics. In his observations, the author devoted a special attention to the first and the fourth characteristics<sup>33</sup>.

In particular, the cooperative method guarantees shared choices and a commitment of people in the democratic society because “that cooperation, properly understood, means continuous integration of different purposes. One who has never been trained in integrating purposes has never experienced true democratic co-operation, since the essence of democracy is the integration of purposes and not mere compromise” (Mannheim 1950: 203). Cooperation becomes an instrument to favor the creation of social groups - the small communities that Mannheim considers fundamental to extend the ties of solidarity in society and to guarantee autonomy, without exposing individuals to the strong conditioning of the Great Society. Again, cooperation has the potential to promote participation and, while in the small group this characteristic amalgamates the ties among people with different roles, in a complex social system it can forge and consolidate the ties between citizens and institutions.

Conversely, integrative behavior is not inspired by a search for compromises among different people, in fact, it tries to favor a convergence of the different viewpoints<sup>34</sup> to a creative form of integration which seeks a cooperation in order to achieve a common way of life. Integrative behavior consists of two dimensions. The first one is tolerance, a concept borrowed from the philosopher and politician Alexander Lindsay<sup>35</sup> and based on the principle that everybody, notwithstanding their social position, can bring up an important issue. Moreover, tolerance is an antidote to fanaticism and is responsible for involving dissenters in a debate that would see them crushed by the majority. To dissenters, it recognizes the roles of making innovative contributions and vitalizing the otherwise neutral public opinion. Tolerance

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<sup>33</sup> The second and the third ones appear as recommendations. The sociologist explains that respect is the basis of equality, because it implies a guarantee for others, furthermore, the reduction of violence keeps one safe from the danger of coercion in the exercise of power.

<sup>34</sup> According to Mannheim (1950: 203), viewpoints come from social standpoints, impulses and interests of people that “shape their experiences and attitude to life in different ways, yet transmute their different approaches for the purpose of co-operating in a common way of life”.

<sup>35</sup> Mannheim is indebted to A. Lindsay also in the concept of operative ideals, essential for the idealist philosopher to build a modern democracy, because they underline the value-driven dimension within the political action analysis, see “Lindsay A.D.” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 1968 and 6 Oct. 2015 [www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com).

offers the opportunity of a form of democratic progress: “is a kind of cooperation that implies constant reinterpretation and integration of essentials in the light of progressive experiences” (Mannheim, 1950: 2006). Providing a chance of expression, valuing the ability to listen and accepting some contributions are attitudes that make tolerance a resource which helps renew the choices.

The second dimension is the *model of democratic responsibility* which contains subjective aspects and objective aspects. The first ones are taken care of and preserved by the liberal tradition and focus on the centrality of the individual and of his conscience as their only measure; the second ones are favored by totalitarian approaches that focus on the conditioning of the internalized values which guide the individual to anesthetize his conscience. According to Mannheim, a balance must be found which promotes both the aspects, because, while the first ones favor individual freedom, the second ones show that responsibility is meaningful within the context in which it is expressed<sup>36</sup>.

Subjective responsibility values spontaneity, which sets creative potential free and has to be refined through trials, in which people are faced with situations never experimented before; it encourages a critical use of intelligence which could develop a thinking process that is open to new methods and new categories; it chooses integrative dynamics which accepts the sharing of a life with the otherness. “A responsibility for the venture of exploring the possibilities of living together in a world community with people who are different, in situation that cannot be foreseen, and under norms that have yet to be found by common effort” (Mannheim, 1950: 214).

Objective responsibility takes into consideration the environmental elements which are crucial for its comprehension. Mannheim believes that content and purpose of conscience<sup>37</sup> are inscribable in an objective set limited by the conditions of the action; depending on where the action takes place, what the possible answers are; following the rules of cooperation. The sense of responsibility is connected to the level of the community relationships,

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<sup>36</sup> Every society trains its citizens for the type of responsibility more coherent with the model of its inspiration: despotic society will pursue a domineering type of responsibility based on the combination ‘authority – servility’ and will foster obedience; in a democratic society an integrative behavior based on cooperation will prevail. Mannheim draws a parallel between the developmental stages of a person and the models of society: despotic societies are closer to childhood, while the democratic ones, to maturity. In history, models repeat cyclically: societies adopt modalities of open socialization, with the democratic model; then, the authoritarian phase takes over when “the fear of liberty” arises.

<sup>37</sup> We have to bear in mind that conscience is the measuring unit of subjective responsibility.



therefore, related to the communicative circuit of the subject and in relation to the radius of his contacts: “the range of responsibility to which the individual feels committed depends to a great extent on the radius of communication and other forms of contact and methods of groups unification immediately affecting him” (Mannheim, 1950: 216).

The close connection between responsibility and extent of the bonds brings Mannheim to see in the choice of a “common cause” a possibility to overcome the differences: he provides as an example the alliance of multiple armies against the same enemy. The author affirms optimistically that people, when unified by a shared cause they fight for, will be led to attribute less and less importance to the differences between people, to the point where they will completely neglect them<sup>38</sup>.

The relational form affects the objective responsibility which is connected to a specific form of sociality. Mannheim indicates three relational forms, each connected to a specific type of sociality: mass relations correspond to a level of superficial and formal fusion; community relations correspond to a balanced level in the relationship between a person and his set; and communion relations correspond to a deep level of integration, but limited to small groups. According to the author, a totalitarian society combines the first and the third forms of sociality so as to create a dominant group (party) with very strong ties, which then exerts its control on the rest of the population. A democratic society, instead, requires a form of community sociality which could cross the borders of the small groups and give them cohesion. It should be spread in a wider society through the combination of functional and communitarian integration in order to preserve the differences and maintain a “common spirit”<sup>39</sup>. A condition for objective responsibility is the need for coherence in the various spheres of life: depending on the level of expectation on the reliability of a social structure, the relevance of the responsibility of the subject changes<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> The extension of this objective responsibility dimension, which affects interethnic and intercultural relations, could lead to a process of education of the “world community”, according to Mannheim.

<sup>39</sup> Mannheim adds two precautions: we should pay attention to all three types of sociality because a “Great Society” is not homogenous; and we should promote the formation of a conscience corresponding to the democratic model, which is distant from a comfortable homologation, from the suggestions of social prophets and from the blindness of sectarian fanaticisms.

<sup>40</sup> To clarify this statement, Mannheim (1950) compares the sphere of business where the request for reliability is high, and the political sphere where the lack of reliability is tolerated and sometimes even justified.

To sum up, we are now able to outline some of the pivotal dimensions which promote *democratic behavior*: on the one hand, there is the cooperative dimension which is identified with the capability of collaboration with the others, and of respecting the difference in the roles; on the other hand, there is the integrative dimension in its two aspects: the first one values tolerance towards the others and the socio-cultural background that the others carry along; the second one favors subjective responsibility, which values creativity and personal peculiarities, and objective responsibility, which values the relational dimension.

### **A society in crisis, yesterday and...today**

So far we have seen how the democratic model is inherently open, because it has to ensure autonomy to individuals, therefore, it will be more exposed to the changes compared to other models, since *Weltanschauung* remains open as well. In this context, *democratic behavior* becomes a guarantee of the democratization process because it makes citizens more involved and responsible.

It is clear now, that promoting *democratic behavior*<sup>41</sup> can respond to yesterday and today's society in crisis. A chaotic situation, which according to Mannheim is prepared by *laissez-faire*, confronts society with a sense of disorientation among people and communities and with the alternative between an authoritarian and a democratic model<sup>42</sup>.

To verify the effectiveness of the *democratic behavior* concept, we can go over the description of the "society in crisis" proposed by Mannheim and draw analogies with the present context, in order to point out the usefulness of the concept. Today again, after a period of ultra-liberalist tendencies, we can note that Western societies are confronted with a bifurcation leading to either populism or a participate democracy. According to Nadia Urbinati (2014), present-day democracy is "disfigured", questioned by the very sphere of production and circulation of ideas, because the sources of information and

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<sup>41</sup> The other and widely debated alternative (Canta, 2006; Remmling, 2015), as previously mentioned, is the social planning for freedom, which also includes the concept of democratic behavior - which we will examine in depth separately, in this essay.

<sup>42</sup> In the preface to *Saggi di sociologia della cultura di K. Mannheim*, Ambrogio Santambrogio (1998) observes that the sense of belonging can be reconstructed by the differentiation, which can go towards totalitarianism, if the sense of disorientation and of social and individual disintegration prevails, or towards democratization if the civil society can manage the crisis and transform it into an opportunity.

distribution of thoughts are monopolized by a limited number of people. This scarce participation in the cultural dimension of democracy leaves room for the diffusion of populist drifts; for a simplification of the relationship between the decision-making process and the efficacy of the action; and for the pursuit of plebiscitary forms of consensus which try to avoid the contribution of intermediate bodies (Mannheim's small communities) to the sphere of the democratic debate.

Society enters a crisis, says Mannheim, when undergoing a historic change, which is characterized by the concept of disintegration. This is different from the concept of social change. The first one is more serious and deeper than the second one: the differences are, first of all, in the pace of the transformations, sudden and abrupt in the case of disintegration, slow and progressive in the case of social change; moreover, there is the different capability of resilience of values and institutions - which in the case of disintegration become insufficient, precarious and useless, while in the case of social change, become symbiotic with the transformation and tend to adapt. Therefore, with social change it is possible to foresee a trend in the future of society, which is different but still following tradition, whereas with disintegration it is only possible to guess some essential elements of the future: in fact, it reveals the turning of a sharp corner, a time of break with tradition, because the replacing social patterns are absent, pre-existent structures are weakened, and the new order cannot be grasped.

In a society in crisis, the success of the authoritarian model is favored by the population's lack of preparation to participate in active political life. A special role is attributed to "social techniques" which serve the minorities in dominant positions, because they can influence the *Weltanschauung*, i.e., the cultural background which forms a common language and provides a "people" with the ability to interpret reality not only rationally but also a-logically<sup>43</sup>. The same techniques could favor either a totalitarian model of society and the diffusion of a citizen-subject behavior, or a democratic model of society with the diffusion of *democratic behavior*, because they affect the elaboration of a people's *Weltanschauung*. These techniques would address to one or the other model and hence to the creation of the desired citizen (Mannheim, 1950). Nowadays, new media have been added to the traditional media. In this respect, the impact of social media makes their effect even more pervasive: peculiar observations have been made by Rowan Wilken (2012) about the contribution of social techniques in the "Arab Spring" and on how they may contain ideologies or promote utopias. The Internet environment

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<sup>43</sup> See the preface to *Sociologia della conoscenza* by Sciolla(2000) and see also the preface to *Le strutture del pensiero* by Allodi A., Crespi F., Santambrogio A. (2000).

could be a stimulus either to an increase of information and participation from the citizens or to a drift towards short cut temptations, in order to simplify the political complexity and favor new forms of populism (Bennato, 2013).

The dimensions of social disintegration, analyzed by Mannheim, offer an interpretation for our time as well, since they remind us of the processes of individualization and de-institutionalization (Giddens, 1990; Touraine, 2002; Beck, 2013; Bauman, 2002), some effects of the techno-nihilist capitalist model (Magatti, 2013) or the restoration of religiousness in the postsecular society (Habermas, Ratzinger, 2005), for example.

The first dimension indicated by Mannheim is the *scarce aggregational capability of the "small organic groups"*, which - from family to neighborhood - no longer offer a reference point for people. Their characteristics of self-regulation and differentiation of tasks on the basis of cooperative lines is no longer effective; as a result, functional interdependence and common purposes have less attractive force, and destabilize the ties formed within. The example is in the metropolitan city in which "the last traces of organic cohesion are fading away and the principle of common living, functional interdependence, and clarity of common purpose are completely destroyed" (Mannheim, 1950: 12). By analogy, an indicator of the current weakness of the small groups is the search for new forms of relationality, blurred by relational games<sup>44</sup> which lead to a globalized society without structural references (Donati, 2013).

The second dimension is the *disintegration of the traditional controls on action*, and is a consequence of the first dimension. In the small groups the orientation toward action is of a traditional kind and creates a situation of great stability where cohesion is created by some basic shared values and where people can rely on a "reasonable prevision" of the others' reaction. When the tradition is de-powered, it impoverishes the small groups' self-control, which is not sufficiently replaced by that of the big organizations<sup>45</sup>. A transposition of this dimension in the present society is in the process of transience of the ties<sup>46</sup> which hinders the possibility to rely on routine<sup>47</sup> (Giddens, 1990).

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<sup>44</sup> Pierpaolo Donati explains that modern society is playing with social relationships because it constantly creates them and then destroys them.

<sup>45</sup> Just like an army or a big factory, in the examples provided by Mannheim (1972).

<sup>46</sup> According to Giddens (1990), ties are both compelling and empowering. Rules themselves are thought of as resources for the actors to produce and reproduce social practices.

<sup>47</sup> "Daily life is connected to the repetitive nature of reversible time, bonded to paths traced in space and time and associated with the binding and empowering

The weakening of the small organic groups affects the third dimension which is the *management of freedom*. Freedom in abstract does not exist; there are relative freedoms within the rules and the instructions that direct people toward specific roles, because freedom only exists in relation with defined rules (Mannheim, 1950). These rules are lost in the Great Society which tends to value the idea of individual autonomy rather than the control of authoritarian institutions. Freedom in abstract, warns Mannheim, is easily manipulated. Mauro Magatti describes the current social model of technonihilist capitalism, which fosters an “imaginary freedom”, because it leaves an empty and easily manipulatable freedom for the individual. Social structure is characterized by financial capitalism which exploits a more and more extensive desire for consumption, stimulated by the continuous process of technological innovation. The latter invades every area of life and finds its basis on a nihilist logic which renders every goal achieved ephemeral.<sup>48</sup>

The fourth dimension too is the consequence of the weakening of the small groups: it is *the disintegration of cooperative controls*. According to the sociologist, societies are inspired by two forms of control, authoritative and cooperative. The first is based on a system of servility and obedience, the second requires consensus and joint participation in power which leads both to acting creatively, and to conceiving a common purpose. These elements can be present in micro communities, but are lost in a complex society because it “produces environmental conditions and spatial distinctions of classes with conflicting mind-sets, and the structure of society produces vested interests for organized groups of people” (Mannheim, 1950: 40)<sup>49</sup>. In parallel with present-day context, we can refer, here, to the loss of participative dimension: for example, in political groups we witness the transition from a model of parties with social representation to a model of democratic research without mediation between leader and electorate. This could favor policies of efficiency which meet the needs and requirements of the citizens, but prevent their involvement in the decision-making process. From this a decommitment originates that negatively affects democratization (Diamanti, 2014).

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features of the body” (Giddens, 1990: 274) This feature of daily life which fosters the process of routinization, has been lost today.

<sup>48</sup> Magatti (2013) writes that nihilism, technique and capital are trained in a system that is self-sustaining. A reality impregnated with nihilism creates the need for continuous change in which every object and relationship has to have a fleeting meaning in order to be quickly replaced; at the same time, technique creates new objects for desire which foster the market and the capital.

<sup>49</sup> Mannheim believes that voting is not enough, elections should be accompanied by a joint participation in the control.

The fifth dimension is *the disintegration of the personality*<sup>50</sup>. The previous points describe a landslide which brings along with it institutions and social bodies, crushes the micro cooperative models<sup>51</sup> and ends up undermining behaviors - which are confused without their reference points, and the way of life and its organization are no longer influenced by traditional standards. The individual is required to be the only creator and director of his own identity and relationships (Beck, 2001). The individual remains alone and bears the responsibility for his actions. Furthermore, the lack of regulations is reflected in his conduct and personality.<sup>52</sup> Mannheim (1950: 18) explains that in a mass society based on *laissez-faire* a sense of disorientation is produced, due to a latent perplexity and a moral insecurity: “people will still behave decently where some remnant of the family code or the professional code are valid, but will fell lost where the old prescriptions vanish without being replaced by new ones, or where new spheres of life develop that are not yet subject to the moral consciousness of the communities”.

The sixth dimension is *the erosion of the extended consensus*, which, in the past, was provided by religion. Daily human activity, to Mannheim, is rooted in routine and conventional patterns, which are based on a common purpose aiming at connecting actions and individual responsibilities to collectivity. Mutual obligations are rooted in the conscience, which can find an amalgam only if a moral and religious interpretation of the events is shared. Therefore, religion offers a common and deep social amalgam. Nationalist, communist and socialist ideologies could not provide the same cohesion. Inside a consensus capable of cooperatively involving the majority of humanity, there is a religious dimension to consider. Thus, according to the sociologist, the Great Society cannot do without a spiritual renewal which takes into account religious differences and “as a creative force will be its ability to integrate means without antagonizing them. The fact that this has hardly happened yet cannot be accepted as a conclusive by those who believe in the creative powers in man” (Mannheim 1950: 20). Today, the process described seems to

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<sup>50</sup> Mannheim describes a further dimension in class conflicts to which, however, he dedicates less space. Nonetheless, he emphasizes that when the conflict reaches fanaticism levels among the classes, it produces social disorganization.

<sup>51</sup> Bauman's (1999) observations on the liquid society actualize the consequences of the friability of institutions and values.

<sup>52</sup> It is interesting, here, to draw a parallel with Sennett (2001) on *L'uomo flessibile, le conseguenze del nuovo capitalismo sulla vita personale*, in which the author reflects on the corrosion of people's character induced by flexible forms of work. Another parallel can be drawn with *Homo narcisista*, described by Cesareo and Vaccarini (2012) as the ideal type of the self-centered present-day man focused on his well-being and his self-fulfillment and hardly capable of creating generative relationships.

be changing direction: we are going towards a postsecular society in which we are witnessing a restoration of a religion in the public sphere and the difficulty to give it a role in the secular debate (Habermas, Ratzinger, 2005; Canta, Casavecchia, Loperfido, Pepe, 2011).

All the dimensions of social disintegration affect the consistency of a society's *Weltanschauung*, which is apparently not working as *humus*, social tie. The absence of intermediate bodies which consolidate the social capital, the weakness of references capable of orientating a subject's actions, an aimless freedom without forms of control to indicate boundaries, the fragility of insecure personalities, the inconsistency of institutions and values, and the rejection of a transcendent dimension - which, to Mannheim, opens man to a higher perspective - corrode the cultural basis of a society, making it less cohesive and more vulnerable to the centrifugal forces focused on the individual's autonomy.

A historic change, therefore, should refer not only to the introduction of some technical innovation which can modify the productive process, or the modification of some behavior along an historical trend, but also requires a shift in the capability to read and interpret the world. A repositioning of the balance of values, from which personal elaboration of thoughts or constructions of collective theories derive, will lay the foundation for the formulation of a new pattern of behavior for people: such as *democratic behavior*, essential because the democratic process "depends essentially upon participation of all citizen in the rights and duties of an ever expanding community" (Mannheim, 1950: 220).

We can now acknowledge that *democratic behavior* responds to certain limits of the described crisis, because it tends to overcome the individual isolation and is open to relationships with others without excluding the dimension of autonomy of the individual; moreover, it tends to promote roles for social groups and, thus increases ties of solidarity; finally, it proposes a tolerant attitude, supported by the concept of relationism, which helps initiate a dialogue on the growth of a common extended consensus<sup>53</sup>. The three aspects correspond directly to the dimensions of social disintegration described above, because they move in counter-trend with respect to an individualized isolation, a corrosion of the small groups, an absolutization of freedoms, a demolition of a shared cultural stratus.

In particular, the cooperative method indicated by Mannheim tends to rebuild the solidarity ties, starting from the closest relationships, and the

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<sup>53</sup> This is today no longer referable to a single religion but to a dialogue amongst seculars and people of different faiths and religions (Canta, Casavecchia, Loperfido, Pepe, 2011).

integrative behavior calls for objective and subjective responsibility and, hence, for the acknowledgement of the consequences of single actions and of single attitudes towards oneself and the collective interests. This behavior demands tolerance, which renders equality - that is to say different but with equal dignity - and appreciates minorities. These minorities could work as a stimulus rather than being crushed by the strength of the majority in a democratic model. Citizenship, furthermore, is an identity dimension which helps people orientate in society, helps them define the 'other' they are faced with, and creates ties among outsiders.

An important step is the ability to unmask the false part of the ideas in order to find an element of sharing in the visibility and transparency. As Baehr (2013: 2) states: "in effect, the persona entailed the construction of a second self: an equal of others who, while in other respects familial strangers, are bound together by the common tie of citizenship; a self-able to cooperate with these strangers, to see things from multiple points of view and be seen seeing. From the modern perspective, in contrast, masking is a way of not being seen, of pseudo representation, of falsification, of imposture; it is unmasking that provides visibility and transparency". The work on the self that implies the process of democratization, highlighted by Mannheim, describes the *pars destruens* of a true research of meaning, to which should be later added the *pars construens* which allows people to recognize the citizenship tie, with the acquisition of *democratic behavior*.

*Democratic behavior*, therefore, becomes *habitus* for the figure of *homo civicus*, considered central in order to involve individuals in the society, by being a "free and democratic form, with which one can fight the mass idiotism and one's interested tutors and advocates; that way out of loneliness which is absolutely necessary for the weaker ones" (Cassano, 2006: 26). This figure has also been characterized by its responsible freedom, which can make individuals subjects capable of interpreting and acting in their own historical context and able to employ strategies for the change: the *homo civicus* would be, indeed, "capable of ensuring people to be thoroughly subject, i.e., having the autonomy and the capability to build their own history...being the authors of their lives" (Cesareo, Vaccarini, 2006: 287).

## **A conclusion**

While piecing together the analysis of the democratic model by Mannheim, we observe that a change in the *Weltanschauung* affects both the social structure and the individuals and can lead to a social disintegration. This change, today as well as at the time of the Hungarian sociologist, raises issues on coexistence and causes widespread uncertainty not only at a level of



individual behaviors or of individual institutions, but at a level of the general orientation of meaning. The proposal of operating according to the democratic behavior becomes a first step in the direction towards a new *Weltanschauung*, more open to the otherness and personal autonomy and, at the same time, capable of creating solidarity ties starting from the construction of common values with the method of relationism. In conclusion, we are still persuaded that this will not be possible with the sole desire of the single individuals but we assert, with Mannheim (1950: 227), that “if a society cannot replace the vanishing institution that fostered a sense of responsibility, it cannot keep responsibility alive by mere inculcation and preaching. The creation of democratic behavior and democratic personality depends on what sort of institution society can provide to guarantee the development of responsibility and efficient social control”.

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