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SCIENTIFIC AND ETYMOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the scientific and etymological interpretations of democracy, tracing its conceptual development from ancient Greek origins to its role in contemporary political systems. The study highlights how democracy, derived from demos *(people) and* kratos *(power), has evolved across historical, cultural, and political contexts while maintaining its essential meaning as "people's rule." The paper examines major theoretical perspectives, particularly those of K. Sartori, A. Kovler, D. Held, A.A. Nudenko, and B.A. Talapov, to analyze democracy both as an ideal and as a socio-political phenomenon. Attention is given to the dialectical relationship between democracy and democratism, where the former embodies theoretical and normative ideals, while the latter reflects empirical principles and practical implementation. The study argues that democracy's true understanding lies in revealing its immanent features – participation, representation, competition, equality, and personal freedom – and emphasizes its dependence on socio-cultural and ethno-national contexts. Ultimately, the article concludes that democracy and democratism are inseparable and mutually reinforcing, and that recognizing their interaction is key to understanding their philosophical, kratological, and legal significance in shaping modern governance.*

KEYWORDS: *Democracy; Democratism; Political philosophy; People's sovereignty; Kratology; Social development; Freedom; Political systems; Athenian democracy; Ethno-cultural context.*

The concept of democracy has been at the center of political and social thought since ancient times. It originates from the Greek words *"demos"* (people) and *"kratos"* (power), literally meaning "power of the people." Throughout history, this term has been interpreted in different ways depending on the era, culture, and political system. By analyzing the scientific and etymological roots of democracy, it becomes possible to understand more deeply its essence, stages of formation, and its place in modern political systems.

When discussing the genesis of democracy, Athenian democracy is often the first to come to mind. Historical sources indicate that Athenian democracy represented the earliest model of people's power. According to K. Sartori, democracy, from its earliest form to its modern appearance, has been a socio-political reality that expresses the will and interests of the people. At the heart of democracy lie the people's will and interests, and by creating the necessary socio-political mechanisms, it ensures the participation of the majority in state governance [1]. Within this harmony, the state and the people reflect one another: the state acts on behalf of the people, while the people rely on the strength and policy of the state. Sartori analyzes the evolution of democratic theory through this interrelation. At times, however, he tends toward subjectivism, emphasizing theory over the analysis of socio-political sources and experiences.

The tendency to avoid empirical sources and experiences, or the inability to connect them with social-philosophical research, reflects a crisis not only of theory but also of practice. According to A. Kovler, the political transformations that took place in the world at the end of the 20th century, along with the contradictory effects of globalization, indicate a crisis of Western models of democracy, which are often difficult to interpret theoretically [2]. However, this crisis does not deny the principle of people's power; rather, it demands its continuation in new forms and with a renewed political existential meaning. Hence, the principle established by Athenian democracy has not lost its essence — at the core of democracy still stands the concept of "people's rule." Its manifestations in historical and political processes are products of their time, expressing the political thinking and experiences of those eras.

Although the scientific and etymological interpretations of democracy rest upon the idea of "people's power," their emphases differ depending on the field of study. For instance, in research works, the concept of democracy is analyzed through the lens of power, the division of power, and the relationship between power and the masses [3]. In such studies, power and democracy are explored through human, social, and administrative dimensions — that is, through their political impact on decision-making processes. The compatibility (or contradiction) between the regulatory and administrative functions of power and democracy is examined [4].

People voluntarily give up certain freedoms to form the state and establish authority. Yet this voluntary act, influenced by objective and subjective factors, can paradoxically lead to a state of unfreedom. This contradiction must be resolved by the state and authority themselves since their primary goal is to serve the people. In the literature on democratic theory, scholars discuss precisely this issue — how to eliminate such contradictions and transform people's power into reality.

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In philosophical and legal studies, democracy is often approached as a legal phenomenon — as the protection of individual rights and freedoms through the functioning of the state, government, and political institutions. Such research analyzes the place of law in social space and the understanding of personal rights and freedoms as indicators of democratic processes [5]. Nevertheless, all these studies share one common feature — a belief in democracy. No one doubts the ideal nature of democracy; however, debates persist regarding how to realize it, especially in harmonizing it with state governance.

American political scientist D. Held analyzed the models of democracy observed in contemporary political life and identified nearly ten different forms [6]. According to A.A. Nudenko, there are more than fifty scientific definitions and interpretations of democracy recognized by many researchers [7]. A significant difference exists between Held's models and Nudenko's definitions. Held focuses on Western, particularly American, political experience, deriving democratic models from it. In contrast, Nudenko draws upon historical and political experiences and analyzes scholarly definitions. Essentially, such experience leads to model formation, while the model, in turn, serves as an empirical foundation for theoretical definitions and interpretations.

In our opinion, the model-based approach to democracy reflects the principle of democratism, while scientific interpretations reflect the researchers' perspectives. From this point of view, democracy (as an ideal) represents theory, definition, and interpretation; democratism represents the model, principle, and empirical base. Just as the latter requires the former as its ideal, the former, through the latter, becomes a gnoseological experience and a subject of further inquiry. At this point, a question arises — based on which features of democracy and democratism can their theoretical and methodological significance be determined? This question drew the attention of B.A. Talapov. He argues that without revealing the inner immanent features of democracy and democratism, it is impossible to understand their political, kratological, and philosophical-legal significance. He identifies the following immanent features:

1. Participation of the majority in socio-political and daily life processes;
2. Governance of state and social life through representative institutions or people's representatives;
3. Maintaining balance and reconciliation among opposing forces;
4. Competition among political leaders and elite groups;
5. Economic democracy and economic competition;
6. Harmonization of centralized administration with local and self-governance;
7. Ensuring social equality;
8. Democracy as personal freedom;
9. Democracy as a form of managing state and social life;
10. Democracy as a social and legal phenomenon;
11. Democracy as a sociological phenomenon;
12. Democracy as a socio-political reality;
13. Democracy as a model of social development — a mechanism linked with realizing social aspirations and ensuring human freedom [8].

Talapov illustrates each of these immanent features from a retrospective, philosophical, and scientific-theoretical standpoint, revealing their functional aspects based on the conceptual ideas of foreign researchers, philosophers, sociologists, and political scientists. Some of his arguments may be debatable; nevertheless, his rational approach — showing democracy as a diverse phenomenon rooted in social reality — is valuable. Thus, the diversity of definitions and models of democracy is not accidental.

The researcher also emphasizes the national characteristics of democracy, stating: "Any social reality, including the principles of democracy and democratism, reflects and expresses specific ethno-cultural and ethno-social relations. Ignoring these characteristics turns democracy into an abstract, even cosmopolitan, idea, resulting in contradictions and conflicts between the universal human essence of democracy and ethno-cultural, ethno-social realities" [8].

Furthermore, Talapov discusses the philosophical and kratological aspects of democracy as a social-political reality linked to the state and political processes, noting their role as distinct immanent features. It must be acknowledged that when interpreting democracy and democratism, the socio-political aspects are often the primary focus. All discussions and debates are usually tied to this reality. Therefore, Talapov rightly points out: "Democracy is inseparably linked to the political system, as it is precisely the political system that ensures personal political freedom and democratic rights, and guarantees that official constitutional and legal norms correspond to political reality" [7].

He also notes that "the political system not only represents broad and diverse political processes but also, on the one hand, expresses the interests of the state, the political regime, and political groups, and on the other hand, organizes social-political reality, mass movements, and the activities of civil society institutions from the standpoint of general democratic development. Hence, democracy is not a spontaneous occurrence nor merely the effort of groups claiming to express the will of the majority — it is the result of conscious activity that adheres to the laws of social development and integrates them into its practice" [7].

Democratism, therefore, is the means of practically ensuring these realities — the immanent features of democracy — within a defined system and set of norms. Thus, democracy and democratism always coexist; denying one inevitably entails denying the other.

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