

# *Meritocracy and Informational Society*

Karabushchenko Pavel Leonidovich

Doctor of Philosophy, professor  
Astrakhan State University  
Astrakhan, Russia  
Pavel\_karabushenko@mail.ru

Krasnozhenova Elena Evgenievna

Doctor of History, professor  
Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University  
St. Petersburg, Russia  
eleena@inbox.ru

Kulik Sergey Vladimirovich

Doctor of History,  
Director of the High School of social sciences  
Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University  
Professor, Saint Petersburg State University  
St. Petersburg, Russia  
kulik54@mail.ru

**Abstract**—One of the main features of the informational society is the strengthening of the meritocratic trends' role as well as the emergence and formation of the meritocracy itself. This paper analyzes the genesis of meritocracy in the context of the general transit of elites from the industrial to post-industrial world. Attention is drawn to the change of the agenda and the nature of elite breeding itself. It is noted that these changes are taking place against the background of the overall decline in professionalism and personal qualities of the political elites subjects, which opens up very good civilizational prospects for the meritocracy and its constructive development.

**Keywords**—*elite, meritocracy, informational society, transformation, elite education, University, values, personality*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The world is on the threshold of serious fundamental changes associated with the transition of the society from the late industrial age to the early post-industrial system. The previous laws, by which industrial society lived and developed, are increasingly being subjected to adjustments of new transformational waves. Modern science is looking for possible options for constructive development. Proponents of the post-industrialism theory have found some fundamental positions, among which meritocracy and the system of elite education are the most acceptable and promising. The meritocratic project will be possible only with the active cooperation with the system of quality education. Therefore, the University is a natural ally of meritocracy. In this regard, the *aim* of this work is to identify trends that contribute to the development of meritocratic trends; the *object* of this study is meritocracy, and its *subject* is its emerging values.

Using the methods of dialectics, hermeneutics and comparative studies, we intend to clarify the qualitative characteristics of meritocratic values, on the basis of which the post-industrial society elite will be further selected.

## II. PROBLEMS OF ELITOLOGIC THEORIES' REVISION

As a science, elitology deals with the analysis of the elites phenomenon. And the main thing in the elite genesis is the dialectic of their development. As a professional community, the elites reflect the essence of their time. It is in them that all the changes taking place with the society are manifested, in the first place. The main problem in the development of elite theories is that the elites themselves do not keep up with scientific theories, while scientific theories sometimes do not keep up with changes in the objective reality. But the most important problem of the elites is that they are increasingly beginning to disagree with their idea. Cognitive distances are increasingly being formed between the idea of the elite (what it should be) and its reality (what it really is), tearing apart this once well-established system of managerial values. Elites enter a period of cognitive dissonance, which affects the quality of their policies.

In this connection, elitologists have long been talking about the need for revision of the classical theories of elites [1]; [2]; [3] which describe the realities of the early twentieth century and, to a large extent, have already lost a significant part of their objectivity and do not correspond to the reality. Classical theories of elites describe mainly oligarchic elites living within the "iron law of oligarchy". Yet at the beginning of this century, in democratic traditions, oligarchic principles are increasingly being criticized by some representatives of the meritocracy.

The process of "masses' revolt" ended in what K. Lasch called "the revolt of the elites" [4]. The analysis of the current the elites' state points to the growing crisis of identity and professionalism, to a sharp decline in the effectiveness of their previous practices and the growth of conflict tensions associated with the general crisis of their values and worldview [5]; [6]. The elites' revolt has led them to degradation, as they all can not adapt to the conditions of the

coming informational society and adopt to its laws of development [7]; [8].

The basic principles of meritocracy were described by Plato in his dialogues "Politician" and "State", where he formulated the principles of professionalism of the elites and the ideal type of the ruler – a philosopher on the throne. In general, Plato's signs of the philosopher on the throne coincide with what modern supporters of post-industrialism write about meritocracy [9]; [10]; [11]; [12].

In the new conditions, the problem of elite breeding is aggravated. Classical models described in the works of G. Mosca, V. Pareto and R. Michels are no longer so relevant. In some cases, we see a mechanical substitution of concepts, when the oligarchy imitates meritocracy, trying to play its role [13]. Today, all the origins of elite breeding lead us to University and to a system of high-quality elite education. And this education is not closed (elite), but open (liberal). Elitism as a system of privileges has always met the interests of aristocracy and oligarchy; elite as a system of personal dignity was characteristic of creative people whom we now refer to the meritocracy [14].

University (Academy of Plato, Aristotle's Liceum, Florentine Academy of Ficino) has always been the cradle of meritocracy. Therefore, the genetic connection of the elites from the entire professional circle with the University will only increase in the future. Meritocracy has the University on its side; oligarchy has banking system on its side. The University produces the scientific values that underlie modern civilization; banks increasingly produce speculative capital (air of questionable numbers). The scales are in relative equilibrium, but the perspective is on the University side.

The modern era can be defined not only as the transition from industrialism to post-industrialism, but also as the struggle of oligarchic values with meritocratic ones [15]. The subject of meritocracy is the carrier of the postindustrial world values, the subject of oligarchy is an adherent of the moribund industrial world values. At the same time, it is not necessary to be among the richest people in the world to be an "oligarch". In a broad sense, "oligarchs" are all adherents of the "iron law of the oligarchy" [1], who can not carry out their professional functions without it. Then those who share and practically adhere to its principles the can be considered meritocracy representatives. Here it is important to remember Plato's idea that "it is especially commendable to live a life fairly, having full freedom to do injustice. Such people are few, but they were there [and will always be]". According to A. N. Berdyaev, meritocracy is the bearer of truly aristocratic morality, for it professes the philosophy of creativity as a philosophy of qualitative transformation of its original spiritual nature [16].

Obviously, meritocracy in the future should suppress the domination of the oligarchy, as the latter once suppressed and made the formerly dominant tribal aristocracy purely symbolic. Therefore, the conflict between the meritocracy and the oligarchy is not just a matter of principle. We are talking about what the world would be without oligarchy or with restricted oligarchical traditions.

Yet meritocracy does not appear out of nowhere and does not come to an empty place. It comes to the intellectual world already prepared for it by the cultural elite. It will in her it many values from it. Yet it also adopts a number of common features from its other predecessors. Thus, it will take the principle of continuity (not by blood only, but also by spirit) from the tribal aristocracy, and from the oligarchy – it will take strict accounting and control of the resources used.

Meritocracy has more opportunities for development than oligarchy or tribal aristocracy. It is more humane, more ethical and is not prone to manipulation and falsification. Aggression and a tendency to forceful methods of solving problems is still remaining in the current elite of oligarchic type, preventing meritocracy from establishing itself as a social constant.

### III. TRANSITOLOGY OF ELITES

The split of modern elites is predefined by the nowadays transitional moment. The ruling elites have lost a clear strategy for their development and we again see scholasticism and dogmatization in their worldview. The analysis of the world's leading politicians' memoirs (such as of T. Blair, G. Bush, H. Kohl, G. Schröder, etc.) indicates that the meritocratic values are more like theatrical props in their activities [17]; [18]; [19]. The elites led by such leaders most often represent carnival-type elites in their professional capacity. Such elites live in conditions of post-truth, when, in the interests of their corporate security, they can falsify any "truth" convenient for them.

The world of modern elites is undergoing significant qualitative changes associated with the transition from the late informational society to the early post-industrial one. The decline in the professional level of the ruling elite groups indicates a general systemic crisis of the worldview – the philosophy that prevailed all this time has exhausted its resources. The elites are in the process of reformatting their core codes. And this transit can take a very long period of historical time.

To be a meritocracy it is necessary to have constant knowledge, which means not only continuous education, but also constant self-training. All this points to the growing role of the University, which system is aimed at training professional elites. The destinies of the elite and the University are already closely linked. Elite education becomes the main mechanism of selection of meritocratic elite.

In the past, meritocracy only produced strategic knowledge. In the future, it will also be required to implement it. The main drawback of the elites of the previous time was that their practices often did not coincide with scientific ideas. There should not be such deficiency in meritocracy, because it is contrary to their own nature. Meritocracy as the elite of knowledge is more in line with the very idea of the elite, i.e. it is both the best and the elected. "Blood elite" (aristocracy) and "wealth elite" (oligarchy) have never been able to implement a complete embodiment of the elite ideas.

The elite of knowledge is the greatest advocate of protecting the Truth from false and wrong information.

Modern political elites are now immersed in the abyss of fake news and glossy PR-technologies.

The modern conflict of the national elites takes place around the fundamental problem – what is considered Truth, authenticity and falsehood. Everybody seeks to impose their system of values, standards and interests on the opponent. Meritocracy does not know such problems. In meritocracy, the principle of the scientific truth primacy is applied.

It is the transit nature of modern elites that makes them unstable. In their characteristics we meet the eclecticism of the industrial value system and the post-industrial era features. The lack of system makes elites vulnerable to the challenge of this transition era.

The modern transitional era faces a number of serious challenges, one of which is the extent to which the current plutocratic absolutism meets the strategic plans and interests of human development. Increasingly, there is criticisms of the ineffectiveness of such a path of development, leading to a monstrous social stratification [20]. It is obvious that industrialism has accumulated a critical mass of systemic flaws that must all be removed during the "post-industrial revolution."

Meritocracy is the only historical form of the elite that is most adapted to the informational society. Neither the aristocracy nor the oligarchy have such abilities. This allows us to say that meritocracy is the conductor of digital culture, taking responsibility for solving the problem of intercultural communication. The modern oligarchy can assume only the technology of manipulative behavior, but not the project of a self-sufficient personality development. In politics, this will require a change of communicational strategies in public administration and public self-government. In order to pass between Scylla and Charybdis of the modern transitional period and to preserve sovereignty and legitimacy, professional elites should review the package of fundamental values and choose the most optimal trends of their development. At the same time, the traditions they have developed can be reformatted to such an extent that they will look like new post-industrial values.

#### IV. VALUES OF THE MERITOCRATIC AGE

At the end of the twentieth century, the Western analysts noted that the position and status of the new elite representatives "are determined in accordance not only with their hierarchical authority, but rather with their scientific competence" [21]. The main value of post-industrialism is not the financial resources, but the knowledge, which causes a conflict of oligarchic and meritocratic values. Since "information is the most democratic source of power", the selection of elites based on this principle generates a completely new type of the highest class. The founder of the post-industrialism theory, D. Bell, noted that "if in the last hundred years the main figures were an entrepreneur, a businessman, the head of an industrial enterprise, today "new people "are scientists, mathematicians, economists and representatives of new intellectual technology" [22].

In the characteristics of meritocracy there are three main qualities: 1) possession of ready-made strategic knowledge; 2) being able to produce fundamentally new knowledge and 3) being able to implement advanced ideas in practice. The nature of the elite of knowledge grows out of these three components. Plato's philosopher on the throne is the embodiment of this idea. He has all the above-mentioned qualities.

Meritocracy is a more complex system than aristocracy and oligarchy prior to it because the blood elite and wealth elite established their dominance in the violence. Meritocracy can apply the right of the strong only in the intellectual sphere. And in order to prevent this possible spiritual violence, it is necessary to widely introduce ethical norms. And here, Y. Habermas' ideas are very interesting, according to which modern moral philosophy comes from a plurality of worldviews (pluralism of values), therefore it does not seek to prescribe a "right way of life" common for all but is limited to questions of justice. In his book "Future of human nature" (2001) he touches upon the theme of liberal eugenics, which is directly related to the problem of elite breeding. He called one part of his work "On the way to liberal eugenics? The struggle for ethical self-understanding of the human race." Authoritarian eugenics, involving centralized design and control, is opposed to *liberal eugenics*, when the "eugenic decisions, driven by interests of benefits and demand preferences, would promote individual choice of the parents, the anarchic desires of the customers and clients as a whole" [23]. The most important is that the science must be protected with a moral framework from interfering with and restricting the human right to be an individual. He brings the issues of morality and personalism to the fore.

The statement of the need to strengthen the role of morality sounds against the background of the general decline of morals in the elite circles of big politics. Modern political elites behave very arrogantly, completely forgetting about the ethics and norms of democracy [24]. Their behavior is increasingly reminiscent of the "feast during the plague". Floodwaters can really happen after them, after which only some meritocratic values will survive. Such sad result of the industrial society elites' development will only stimulate the development of meritocracy, make it more resistant to the challenges of its global era.

It is personalism, in our deep conviction, that should become the philosophy of meritocracy, because it reflects its essence in the most complete form [25]; [26]; [27]; [28]. This is also indicated by the character of the personalists' description of the personality phenomenon, which in many respects resembles the character of the supporters' description of meritocracy post-industrialism. E. Mounier, in particular, noted that an individual is in a hostile relationship with reality, that "the life of the individual begins with the ability to break contact with the environment, with a new mastery of oneself, with a new self-mastery, in order to concentrate" [29]. So before an individual (meritocracy) expresses him/herself, one needs to go within oneself and focus [30]. In order to protect and preserve themselves, the meritocracy representatives often

use such means of communication as irony, humor, paradox, myth, symbol, pretense, etc. Such behavior protects the individual and society from both totalitarianism and individualism, according to the personality philosophy representatives. "Personality exists only at the cost of loss. Its wealth is what it has left with when it loses everything it has, what it has left at the hour of death" [31]. To be a representative of the tribal aristocracy or oligarchy one does not have to be a self-sufficient person. But in order to enter the circle of meritocracy, such requirement becomes absolute. That is why personalism is central to the system of meritocratic values, in our opinion.

The potential of meritocracy is unlimited, while the oligarchy possibilities are limited by financial resources. The prospect of oligarchy rests on the time limits of the industrialism possibility. Beyond the planning horizon, it has virtually no future. It will inevitably turn from a leading force into a subsidiary structure. The prospects for meritocracy are only just beginning to emerge. On this way of the development, meritocracy and oligarchy differ — the latter is descending into the past, the first is ascending into the future. Modernity may have become the point of intersection of these two multidirectional movements. This is a time when the oligarchy can no longer manage complex world systems in the old way, and the meritocracy is not yet able to build its system in a new way [32]. The era of change always affects the quality of society's governance and those who directly manage it.

## V. CONCLUSION

The question of meritocracy is a question of the future of humanity, a question of the new state of economy and political institutions, the painful transformation of which is already taking place before our eyes. At present, meritocracy is more sacramental than objective. It is more frequently referred to as a must than to something real. Yet meritocracy demonstrates its presence not in its form, but in the manifestation of its content. Increasingly, its features are beginning to manifest themselves in the genesis of elites and require their subjects to restructure their professional system. Meritocracy is an ideal that is realized in the course of the genesis of the elite of knowledge. This is the professionalism in the sphere of high technologies (both technical and humanitarian systems); it is the sphere of creativity, the area of the strategy and the area of analytics.

## REFERENCES

- [1] R. Michels, "Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie", Untersuchungen über die oligarchischen Tendenzen des Gruppenlebens, 1911, Leipzig, 1925.
- [2] G. Mosca, "The Ruling Class", (Elementi di scienzapolitica, 1896) N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1939.
- [3] V. Pareto, "Trattate di sociologigenerale", (1916), In 2 voll., Vol. 2, Milano: Edizioni di Comunita, 1964.
- [4] Ch. Lasca, "The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy", W.W. Norton & Company, New York–London, 1995.
- [5] Crippled America: How to Make America Great Again by Donald J. Trump. New York: Threshold Editions, 2015.
- [6] P.C. Roberts, "How America was Lost", From 9/11 to the Police, Warfare State, Clarity Press, 2014.
- [7] S. Talbott, "The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy by Strobe Talbott. Random House Trade Paperbacks", 2003.
- [8] U. Ulfkotte, "Gekaufte Journalisten: Wie Politiker, Geheimdienste und Hochfinanz Deutschlands Massenmedien," Kopp Verlag, 2014.
- [9] M. Young, "The Rise of the Meritocracy: 1870 - 2033: An Essay on Education and Equality", London, Thames and Hudson, 1958.
- [10] D. Bell, "The coming of post-industrial society: a venture in social forecasting", 2nd ed. N.-Y.: Basic Books, 1976.
- [11] A. Toffler, Toffler Power Shift. Knowledge, "Wealth and Violence at the Edge of the XXI century", NY–Toronto–London, 1990.
- [12] A. Toffler, "Future shock", N.-Y.: Random House, Curtis Brown, Ltd. 1970.
- [13] C. Hayes, "Christopher. Twilight of the Elites: America After Meritocracy", Crown Publishing Group (NY), 2012.
- [14] P. Karabushchenko, I. Lebedeva, O. Mantserova, "Urgent problems of the elite education development", [International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conferences on Social Sciences and Arts S G E M 2 0 1 5. Psychology and psychiatry, sociology and healthcare, education. Conferenceproceedings, Volume II, 26 August – 1 September, 2015, Albena. Bulgaria, pp. 377-385].
- [15] G.K. Ashin, P.L. Karabushchenko, "Meritocratic and Oligarchic trends in the assessment of the current elite education", Questions of elitology: philosophy, culture, politics, Vol. 7-8, 2011, pp. 14-15.
- [16] N.A. Berdyaev, "The meaning of creativity. Philosophy of creativity, culture", art. In 2 Vol., Vol. 1, Moscow, Art Press, 1994, pp. 252-253.
- [17] G. Schröder, "Entscheidungen: Mein Leben in der Politik. Hamburg", 2006.
- [18] G.W. Bush, "Decision Points. Moscow, ZAO "OLMA Media Group"", 2011.
- [19] T. Blair, "A Journey: My Political life", KNOPF Publishers, 2010.
- [20] T. Piketty, E. Saez, "Income inequality in the United States", 1913–1998, Quarterly Journal Of Economics, Vol. CXVIII, February 2003, Issue 1, pp. 1-39.
- [21] A. Tnurciine, "The Post-Industrial Society. Tomorrow's Social History: Classes. Conflicts and Culture in the Programmed Society", NY., 1974, p. 65.
- [22] D. Bell, "The coming of post-industrial society: a venture in social forecasting", 2nd ed, N.-Y.: Basic Books, 1976, p. 344.
- [23] J. Habermas, "Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur. Auf dem Weg zu einer liberalen Eugenics. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp", 2001.
- [24] U. Ulfkotte, "Volkspädagogen – Wieens die Massen medien politisch korrekter zie henwollen. Kopp Verlag, Rottenburg am Neckar", 2016, pp. 11, 150.
- [25] N.A. Berdyaev, "Personalism and Marxism", Way, 1935, № 48, pp. 3-19.
- [26] E. Mounier, "Manifeste au service du personnalisme", Collection Points Essais, Paris, 1936.
- [27] E. Mounier, "Le personnalisme", Paris, Les Presses universitaires de France, 1949.
- [28] J. Lacroix, "Marxisme, existentialisme, personnalisme", 1949, Paris, 1966.
- [29] E. Mounier, "Le personnalisme", Paris, Les Presses universitaires de France, 1949, p. 52.
- [30] E. Mounier, "Le personnalisme", Paris, Les Presses universitaires de France, 1949, p. 53.
- [31] E. Mounier, "Le personnalisme", Paris, Les Presses universitaires de France, 1949, p. 59.
- [32] P. Karabushchenko, I. Lebedeva, "Meritocracy as a synthesis of elite education and post-industrialism", European Applied Sciences, № 1, 2013, pp. 232-235.