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Angelica versus Orlando

I would like to use the space of this pre paper as a copybook to discuss with you the reflections that I have been pursuing here at the Italian Academy over the last two months and that I aspire to transform into a volume of essays. It is a truly multidisciplinary project, touching on the history of political doctrines, art history, history and literature of the renaissance and its reception, modern and contemporary law, and Jewish history. Of many of these fields, I have superficial knowledge. I will take advantage of my ignorance to benefit from the expertise that each of you has developed in your specific field of study. Some of the essays are already at an advanced stage; others are in the state of drafts. I will present here only the main theses, leaving out the most exciting part: the demonstration.

Introduction

The populist wave unleashed in the West following the 2007-08 economic crisis and the following pandemic wave due to COVID-19 have profoundly altered the concepts which govern the relations between the masses and the elite. Partly as a result of a series of regulatory failures [Tooze, 2018], the masses have recently taken the choice for themselves on all matters affecting collective life. Democratic decision-making by majority vote has increasingly come to be seen as being in contrast with rational choice mechanisms, mathematical models and scientific analysis. Instead, the ongoing pandemic has rekindled attention to the fair distribution of information, the rights to knowledge and the ability of the masses to negotiate the decisions promoted by experts. The phase that has been unfolding for the last fifteen years can therefore be defined as an increasingly stronger attack on technocracy and the class that represents it. It challenges the model based on cosmopolitanism and transnationalism, according to which the collective good is an objective and universal principle,

identifiable through reason, beyond the particularisms of national identity and the borders between States.

Let us start with a definition. The literature on the concept of technocracy is not free from ambiguities.[1] However, it is possible to underscore five aspects that are frequently present in scholarship. Technocracy:

1. Is based on an elitist conception of the social relations within the body politic. According to this idea, the ruling class should be «a caste of hyper-specialized bureaucrats» [Khanna]

2. Replaces the «democratic idol» with the measurable principle of efficiency, and the concept of truth as social construction with abstract reason.[2]

3. On the national as well as the international ground, technocracy refuses the idea of a centralized power in favour of an *assemblage* of several agencies, on the model of corporate structures [Burnham]. According to this, a new expression has been coined: «governance without govern» or «Law without Nations» [Rabkin, Cassese]. This means that, according to this conception, technocracy is against the model of the modern state – as it has been thought during the XVI and XVII century – and in fact transcends it.

4. Each agency operates through problem-solving approach, pursuing specific targets by autonomous procedural rules [Horkheimer, Habermas]. According to many scholars, technocracy is based on the separation of practical outcomes from moral, social, political, and religious values [Schmitt], transforming citizens into users of goods and services [Khanna].

5. It is grounded on a norm-based system and on the construction of universal standards that constrain individuals and reduce the space for negotiation among private parties in a form that follows, but that I use extensively, the concept of «juridification» [Bohman, 2005].

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[1] For instance, it's difficult to grasp the difference between a technocratic regime and a bureaucratic one.
[2] «too much democracy hinders policy»; «Democracy guarantees neither the formation of good ideas nor their realization», B. Khanna, *Technocracy in America*, p. 69.

But which is the genealogy of the modern technocracy? The term "technocracy" appeared in Western political thought in the 1930s. Associated with the affirmation of the Rooseveltian New Deal, it has been openly theorized by authors such as Veblen (*The engeneers and the price sistem*, 1919) and most importantly by Stuart Chase (*Technocracy*, 1932) and Graham Laing (*Towards Technocracy*, 1933), with the initial intent to plan industry, national energy production, and consumption – and later all aspects of state administration – in rational terms. What initially concerned only a portion of the intellectual class (essentially engineers) later expanded to absorb every sphere of collective life and the management of national and international affairs.

If technocracy as a governing practise is envisioned in the 1930s, its theoretical and philosophical roots were outlined roughly a decade earlier. 1918 was a pivotal year in this respect. Oscar Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* and Max Weber's *Wissenschaft als Beruf* were published one after the other. For both, contemporaneity is the result of the implementation of practices and technical knowledge aimed at a purpose (what Horkheimer would call «instrumental reason»); avoiding any possibly explosive discussion on the values of community.[3] The current literature on technocracy unanimously supports the thesis that this form of government is the epochal effect of a paradigm shift in Europe and the United States between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. This is a "teleological" reading of historical processes that should, in my opinion, be made more flexible. [Schmitt, Heidegger].

A wider project

During my stay at the Italian Academy and thanks to the inputs I am receiving from its vibrant and multidisciplinary community, I am trying to elaborate a wider and interdisciplinary project on the genealogy of the concept of technocracy. Therefore, please allow me to use this text as a real

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[3] Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1947.

copybook, in which I present my very preliminary draft. The main hypothesis I start with is that the technocratic elitism is not something that appeared once for all in the Western society during the XX century due to epochal shifts [Schmitt, Weber], but on the contrary it is a *political option* which is always possible to activate in specific historical phases. In this respect, I shall focus on the modern period (XVI and XVII century) and its XX century re-uses to extract what I believe are the four distinctive features of technocracy's morphology.

The volume will collect material on which I have already worked in part but present it in a new theoretical framework; the last part will result from the research I am conducting here at the Academy. It will be organized in four essays (with the risk of being miscellaneous), each of them containing a very specific case-study. Working through the micro-historical approach (meaning "working at the microscope" rather than "working on marginal stories") [Ginzburg, Levi, Zemon Davis], and taking for granted its ability to prove paradigmatical issues (which I am not able to call into question), I will try to extract four traits I believe to be foundational with respect to the morphology of the "technocratic option":

1. The "technocratic option" is not something that emerges *against* the model of the modern state; on the contrary, it is the logical result of the functioning of its own structure. In other words, the managerial state that underlies modern technocracy is actually an ever-available possibility because it is inscribed within the same primordial formulation of the modern state. In order to prove my hypothesis, I shall work on a reinterpretation of Leviathan's frontispiece (1651). [See a brief synopsis in the appendix].

2. The technocratic option represents an everlasting way to neutralize political conflicts and a modality to translate clashes concerning values into formal and technical terms. I will try to demonstrate my hypothesis working on a treatise which I believe to be the very first European attempt to elaborate a technocratic theory: Uberto Foglietta's *De philosophiae et iuris civilis inter se comparatione* (1555). I will try to uncover its political aim (influencing the Sacro Collegio, one of the most important curial institutions, and the papal

election of the 1555) and its material diffusion through the XVII counterreformation preaching.

3. One of the most relevant consequences of the technocratic approach concerns the polarization of the social body between the "unaware masses" and the expert élite. This opposition is not simply rhetorical. Grounded on the myth of practical reason, technocracy entails *per se* the split of the social body into two groups, generating frictions. I intend to demonstrate my statement working on a specific *literary topos* that circulated among several authors of utopias between the XVI and the XVII century (Thomas More, Anton Francesco Doni, Tommaso Campanella): the so-called "favola degli indovini"

4. The elitist-technocratic option is usually elaborated and proposed by social and cultural minorities in order to counterbalance the political preponderance of the majority during phases of political crisis. This last point is the subject of the research I am conducting at the Italian Academy.

The Italian Elitism

Alongside those listed, there is another crucial theoretical basis of the twentieth-century technocratic formulation that is often forgotten: Italian elitism. The central body of this theory was elaborated between the 1890s and the first two decades of the 20th century. The first political, theoretical and institutional objective of elitism is to cope with a new subject emerging on the plane of Italian history (and not only): what in early twentieth-century literature is referred to as the "mass" or "crowd". This emergence is due, on the one hand, to the extension of the right to vote (in Italy between 1912 and 1918); on the other hand, to the centrality that new political subjects such as the working class and the nationalized masses assume [Mosse]. The mass is transformed into a new object of theory, subjected to investigation not only "politological" but also psychological, in Italy and abroad (Le Bonn, *Psycholgie des foules*, 1895, Ortega Y Gasset, *La rebelion de las massas*, 1930).

Between 1895 and 1930 Gaetano Mosca, Roberto Michels, Guglielmo Ferrero, and Vilfredo Pareto worked on theoretical solutions to counterbalance the destabilizing weight of the masses in the Italian political system, reaffirming the centrality of the concept of the elite. One of the most precise formulations of the elitist theory can be found in Gaetano Mosca's *Elementi di scienza politica* (1896):

Among the constant tendencies and facts found in all political organisms, there is one whose evidence can be easily manifested to all: in all societies [...] there are two classes of people: that of the governors and that of the governed. The first, which is always the least numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power, and enjoys the advantages that are attached to it; while the second, more numerous, is directed and regulated by the first in a more or less legal way, or more or less arbitrary and violent, and provides it, at least apparently, with the material means of subsistence and those that are necessary to the vitality of the political organism. In the practice of life, we all recognize the existence of this ruling class or political class. [Gaetano Mosca, Elementi di scienza politica, in Id., Scritti politici, Torino, Utet, 1982, vol. II, p. 608][4]

If Mosca used the neutral term "political class", thus denying the ruling classes any kind of technical/moral superiority, Pareto in his *Trattato di Sociologia Generale* (1916) and Guglielmo Ferrero in *America new Rome* (1914) employed on the contrary the evaluative term "elite", destined to worldwide success:

Let us suppose that, in each branch of human activity, we assign to each individual an index indicating his ability. [...] Let us, therefore, make a class of those who have the highest indices in the branch of their activity, to which we will give the name of the elected class (elite). [Vilfredo Pareto, *Trattato di sociologia generale*, 1916, vol. 3, § 2027 e 2031, pp. 1943-4][5]

In Michels, the maintenance of social order comes into explicit contradiction with the concept of democracy:

[…] with an ever-increasing organization, democracy is in the process of diminishing, because the power of leaders grows as the organization grows. [Roberto Michels, *La sociologia del partito politico*, Torino, UTET, 1912, p. 57][6]

Once established, the elite undertakes a process, well documented by the work of Roberto Michels, which leads logically towards technocratic outcomes:

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[4] «Fra le tendenze ed i fatti costanti, che si trovano in tutti gli organismi politici, uno ve n'è la cui evidenza può essere facilmente a tutti manifesta: in tutte le società […] esistono due classi di persone: quella dei governanti e l'altra dei governati. La prima, che è sempre la meno numerosa, adempie a tutte le funzioni politiche, monopolizza il potere e gode i vantaggi che ad esso sono uniti; mentre la seconda, più numerosa, diretta e regolata dalla prima in modo più o meno legale, ovvero più o meno arbitrario e violento, e ad essa fornisce, almeno apparentemente, i mezzi materiali di sussistenza e quelli che alla vitalità dell'organismo politico sono necessari. Nella pratica della vita tutti riconosciamo l'esistenza di questa classe dirigente o classe politica».

[5] «Supponiamo che, in ogni ramo dell'umana attività, si assegni a ciascun individuo un indice che indichi la sua capacità. […] Facciamo dunque una classe di coloro che hanno gli indici più elevati nel ramo della loro attività, alla quale daremo il nome di classe eletta (élite)».

[6] «con un'organizzazione in continuo aumento la democrazia è in fase di diminuzione, perché il potere dei dirigenti cresce nella misura in cui cresce l'organizzazione».

A consolidation process follows the phase of formation of the oligarchy: on the one hand, the bureaucratization and centralization of the organizational system develop; on the other hand, the professionalization of members of the minority strengthens. [Volpe, p. 40][7]

Starting from these clearly oligarchic and anti-democratic positions, Vilfrido Pareto, Roberto Michaels and (partly) Gaetano Mosca moved more and more towards ultra-conservative positions, until all (or at least the former two) of them openly supported the affirmation of the Fascist party as an entity capable of restoring political order in the Italian context between 1919 and 1922. Only Guglielmo Ferrero maintained a strong anti-fascist orientation, ending up several times in exile and in confinement.

The solution that Ferrero proposes to the question of the "masses" is decisively more liberal and progressive, and, according to some scholars, belongs to a second phase of elitism [Morgandini]. Ferrero's starting point is the distinction between the political class (the administrative class that concretely manages the affairs of the state) and the elite (all the social forces capable of orienting and guiding the masses on a moral and intellectual level), which he elaborated in part thanks to his study of the situation in the United States that took place during his stay there in 1908-1909. He then develops an "elitism of competence" tempered, however, by the principle of democratic legitimacy. This thesis is clearly put forward in an article published in 1930 and significantly entitled *The Unity of the World*, which summarizes a series of positions expressed in the preceding decades: the conflict between civilization and barbarism, in accordance with Lucien Romier's standpoint, is described in terms of a confrontation between nationalism and culture, the latter being understood as «the harmonious and balanced synthesis of moral principles, scientific knowledge, social institutions, practical activities and esthetic creations». The only way to overcome a tragic era of conflicting values («democracy against dictatorship, free thought against dogma, socialism and communism against capitalism») is to build a «European élite of faith and ideals, science and art […] superior to national egos» through a universal institution «analogous in a certain degree to that of the Church during the

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[7] «Alla fase di formazione dell'oligarchia segue un processo di consolidamento della stessa: da un lato si sviluppano la burocratizzazione e la centralizzazione del sistema organizzativo, dall'altro la professionalizzazione dei membri della minoranza».

Middle Ages» [p. 300]. Within this framework, however, the national masses do not disappear. On the contrary, Ferrero is openly in favor of universal suffrage as a form of regulated conflict between the various groups and interests within the people, thus creating a natural convergence towards the center and, consequently, towards moderate solutions. However, «the elite [...] should always watch over the sovereign will of the people». Therefore, elitism is transformed into a theory of "putting the crowd under protection" and democracy a regulatory system governed by the elites.

Italian elitism had great success in the United States, in particular in two important academic centers: Chicago University and Columbia (with a role also played by the Italian Academy and Prezzolini, cf. Faedda), and constituted the theoretical foundation of the subsequent technocratic elaborations. The most recent research trends, strangely enough, do not include Ferrero's name in the list of elitists and date the introduction of these theories in the United States quite late (around 1920, cf. Volpe). However, one of the marginal results of my study consists in proving that in fact the privileged channel of diffusion of the elitist theories in America was Guglielmo Ferrero himself, who had a very good acquaintance since 1904, but especially since 1908, when at the direct invitation of Theodore Roosevelt, he held a series of conferences at Columbia and in Chicago, where he met Merriam, Butler and the other fathers of American elitism.

My research at the Italian Academy: a case study

My research here at the Academy aims to study the fundamental contribution that a small circle of twentieth-century Italian intellectuals gave to the elaboration of the elitist theory at the basis of the modern technocratic approach. This group of anti-fascist intellectuals and writers, often exiles and belonging to political, religious, even academic minorities, started to question from 'outside' the modern sources of the Italian tradition and in particular its Rinascimento to find answers to the crisis of the Italian liberal system between 1919 and 1933. I will try to show how the interpretation of fascism elaborated by this group was not actually dominated by the dichotomy dictatorship versus

democracy, but rather defined the fascist phenomenon as a wrong answer to the right question of the management of the masses. This interpretation, in my opinion, is not strictly confined in the boundaries of political reflections; on the contrary, it involves private instances regarding the state, identity and perceiving oneself as a minority within an oppressive majority.

Leo Ferrero is the scion of one of the most important intellectual dynasties in Italy. He was born in Turin in 1903, as the son of Guglielmo and Gina Lombroso. He is the grandson on his mother's side of one of the most relevant academics of the second half of the 19th century, Cesare Lombroso, a positivist criminologist, and father of phrenology and controversial doctrines on race. The Lombrosos were an influential orthodox Jewish family, although already with Cesare, during the Risorgimento, a process of secularization began, according to a well-known pattern in the history of the Italian Jewish community [Sarfatti, De Felice]. Leo, however, maintained a complex relationship with his origins: from what I can reconstruct from his father's library, he read many books on Jewish culture; from the study of his papers in the archives of Fiesole, he maintained close relations with many exponents of the Italian and international Jewish community. When Hitler came to power in January 1933, he was in New York, where he participated in a meeting of the local Jewish community as a message of sympathy (cf. *Amérique, miroir grossissant de l'Europe*, p. 69). From a very young age, he is a fervent anti-fascist, and this will lead him to choose exile in Paris in 1928 to avoid worse consequences. Moreover, he is also an exponent of a family and an academic network of positivist school, which will be heavily marginalized in the Italian university system between the 1910s and 1930s due to the emergence of the idealistic school of Croce, Spaventa and Gentile. This is a marginalization that will weigh heavily on his own father Guglielmo, excluded in 1910 from the university as a result of strong pressure from Croce.

Being in this condition of minority, Ferrero begins a dialectic of negotiation of the concept of Italian identity starting from a long work of recovery of authors and categories of the Italian sixteenth century in a clearly anti-fascist function. This gave rise to an original "elitist" reading of the Renaissance (in particular of authors such as Leonardo, Machiavelli and Machiavellism, Ariosto),

which led to the elitist theses presented in their "technocratic" form in *Amérique, miroir grossissant de l'Europe* and in particular in *Pouvoir et influence (Le rôle des Élites)*, conceived by Ferrero as a seminar of Human Relation at Yale University, where he was visiting thanks to a fellowship granted by the Rockefeller Foundation.

Expected outcomes

The main objectives of my research are twofold: 1) to use the "Leo Ferrero phenomenon" as a case study to test the starting hypothesis, whereby oppressed minorities in a phase of crisis tend to orient public debate in favor of elitist-technocratic political options; 2) taking steps from a recent work by Maifreda (Italya, 2021), the attempt is to investigate how oppressed minorities work not only on the construction of "marginal" cultures or subcultures (to use a Gramscian category), but on the contrary engage in rewriting the core of the national heritage and also reflect in terms of hegemony and consensus, implementing specific material strategies of diffusion of their thought. With regard to the last point, my goal will also be to investigate how, through the solidarity of the Italian emigration circuits abroad, of the exiled groups of anti-fascists and also of the international Jewish networks, Ferrero's operation spread globally and influenced institutional levels (I am thinking of figures such as Giovanni Malagodi, President of the Italian Senate and Minister of Economy, Leo's friend; Sami Lattes, founder of the *Amitié judéo-chrétienne de France* and the cultural organs of the Society of Nations and pieces of American intellectuality, such as Leo Strauss). A third purpose is to study how the rewriting of the Italian Renaissance has globally altered (especially in areas with a very young history of academic reception) the image of the sixteenth century.

Some of this work has taken place and will take place in the archives and private libraries indicated in the bibliography.

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