

Preface

by Anna Loretoni*

Democracy is a form of government which, despite the immediacy of its meaning as 'people's government', has always been a rather complex field of investigation for political theory. If then the reflection on democracy is part of a conception of historical time in which not only the movement towards the best is postulated, but also the regression and the possibility of decivilization, the investigation is necessarily more articulated. As Horkheimer and Adorno remind us, the possibility of barbarism always remains on the horizon, and civilization is always threatened by its reverse; a kind of immanent danger of modernization where 'instead of entering a truly human state humanity can sink into a new kind of barbarism'. Even according to John Keane, whose interesting reflection on democracy is first offered to the Italian public in this volume, this political form has nothing natural or inevitable. Precisely because it is fragile and extremely precarious, democracy needs an analysis that uses a courageous and creative way of thinking. This is perhaps what is missing from the answers offered by the literature on the subject, and which in Keane's opinion are inadequate. In an attempt to reconfigure the horizons of democracy in the 21st century, the author distances himself from a political science that, on the basis of statistical fetishism for facts and numbers, ends up limiting our ability to think outside the box, prevents us from adopting 'irregular thinking', and unruly gives us to old research methodologies.

Never as in the current historical phase, reflection on democracy therefore requires innovation and imagination. In the long period of the post-Cold War period, characterized by the disappearance of a political alternative to liberal democracy, the analysis can only start from the observation, in many ways paradoxical, of the deep crisis of democracies. Mainstream literature on the subject has focused, especially over the last decade, on the analysis of populism as a degeneration and disfigurement of democracy. Populism would thus represent not only a pathology of electoral-representative democracy, but also a degeneration of the good ideal of counter-democracy, as the source of a perverse reversal of the values and procedures of democracy as a whole. In an attempt to resolve the difficulties inherent in the depiction of the people, populism imaginarily resurrects its unity and homogeneity, while emphasizing the distance from what opposes it: the elites, the executives, the foreigner, the enemy. These elements therefore represent a kind of essential externality with respect to the people, who are one with the exaltation of their moral superiority over the corrupt. Ultimately, in order to find a remedy for the pathologies of democratic representation, populism formulates a substantial conception of social dumping, a healthy and homogeneous people, without divisions, producing consequences not only for those included, but also for the excluded. By defining by this the group to which they belong and the non-membership groups, it legitimizes the

fact that the values, interests and desires of the latter can be legitimately ignored. This internal-out-of-trace division clearly traces the *boundaries of the demos*, which is no longer the democratic one of the members of the political community, but that of those who, because they are morally superior, constitute the real part of citizenship and who therefore claim the 'moral monopoly of representation'.

As is obvious to expect, John Keane's book not only proposes a regulatory vision of democracy that is siderally distant from its populist drift, but also differs from readings of democratic processes that have led to the pinpointing of post-democracy scenarios. Keane's volume greatly expands the horizon of reflection, and makes it more complex. The first point I would like to make is the focus of a non-ethnocentric perspective of research into democracy. The world is no longer synonymous with Europe and America, says the author, the West is no longer the only way to modernize, and it is not possible to apply the 'Western meters' if we want to study democracy on a global scale. *Our size doesn't fit all*, we could say. A new line of research, defined by the author as the 'indigenisation of democracy', leads him to examine the interesting examples of Taiwan, Australia and Antarctica, contexts where significant mutations have occurred with respect to the classic liberal core of democracy. More generally, Keane argues that the family of democratic types is expanding, subject to a series of space-time variations that configure mutations and evolutions of great interest to political theory. These mutations also include a classic theme of theoretical reflection, that of the spatialization of politics, specifically: its re-spatialization beyond the borders of the State. Without giving anything to populism and nationalism, Keane intends to overcome the 'territorial mentality' of a certain vision of democracy, on the basis of those experiences which, starting with the European Union, also include bi and multilateral cooperation in the Pacific region of Asia, while at the same time promoting awareness of complex interdependence on a global scale. Without going so far as to espouse the normative excesses of reflection on cosmopolitan democracy, the author is measured by a pragmatic hypothesis of the coexistence of state, supranational and international bodies. By introducing a disconnect between democracy and place, this line of research is emancipated from the orographic qualification of democracy and is in favour of a deterritorialisation of democratic spirit, language and policies.

The book's key concept, *monitoring democracy*, attempts to capture the final figure of one of the many transformations to which democracy has been subjected by space-time conditions and which has been on its way since 1945. An indication of the character of this democracy is the invention of surveillance mechanisms, supervisory and power-control bodies which have helped to put the laconic representation of democracy as a mere periodic election of legislative representatives in the attic and which has also played a role in the specialist literature on the subject. In this respect, democracy becomes a much more demanding regime, identifying itself with the public process of controlling power,

including through the new media galaxy and its contribution to the spirit of monitoring democracy. From this point of view, Keane proposes an optimistic look at the literature that at this stage identifies the development of processes that negatively radicalize the surveillance democracy itself. According to the latter hypothesis, the intent to inspect the action of powers and submit them to criticism sometimes turns into compulsive and permanent stigmatization of the governing authorities. Power tends to be criminalised or ridiculed, and civic activity ends up in the sole function of indictment, recognising only a justice of repression, sanction and condemnation, which often encroaches on anti-politics or impolitics.

It would, however, be a mistake to present Keane's reflection as trivially optimistic: even monitoring democracy is in danger of not surviving. On the risk assessment side, the book is part of the much-attended debate on the relationship between capitalism and democracy, focusing first and foremost on the theme of growing inequalities, read not only in the light of the endogenous structures of the capitalist market, but with a view to 'democratic failure', which signals in the author's opinion the inability of politics to control and curb financial dynamics. Here Keane clearly sees some regressive tendencies, in the light of the proliferation of models of social injustice that seem to lead us back to eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Europe, and which can have catastrophic results for democracy and equality. The latter category, and not freedom, is the key concept of democracy for the author; a large chapter of the book is dedicated to its analysis, which proposes a critical reading towards its elementary interpretations, for the benefit of a multifaceted and complex vision of what it means to be equal individuals, to enjoy the same opportunities, to live in conditions of well-being. A final point worth drawing the attention of those who are about to read this book is the emergence of new battlegrounds on the political field of the biosphere. Taking contemporary global challenges seriously, *firstly, environmental crises* - from climate to the challenge posed by the destruction of species - Keane is convinced, even in the awareness of the problematic nature of the issue, that in democratic dynamics we must include the complex forces and needs of non-human nature, going beyond human arrogance and anthropocentrism, to emphasize our symbiotic relationship with the biosphere, in perspective, whose philosophical origin is carefully retraced, which invites us to take care of the world. How much it is possible to radically redefine democracy so that the non-human can also find space there, extending the political principle of equality not only to markets but also to the biosphere, remains a question of great interest, around which this book boldly invites us to reflect.

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