

Alessandro Ferrara: *The Democratic Horizon. Hyperpluralism and the Renewal of Political Liberalism.*

Cambridge U.P. 2014, 254 p.

When asked by dr. Hrubec to reflect on this book, I came up with a review title:

The Democratic Horizon Enframed in a Network of Visions

According to prof. Ferrara, the initial thesis concerning the democratic horizon means that democracy is considered to be the only legitimate form of government. The ensuing thesis affirms that political liberalism is most capable of addressing the complex interplay of democracy and the normativity of identity. This implies that the idea of democracy ought to remain faithful to its core principle of self-government. In this paper, I will attempt to examine this basic argument.

In my opinion, democracy has never embodied a regime of self-government, neither in the ancient polis nor in the specific Western form of representative democracy married to capitalist economy. Democracy is committed to the rule of people: G. Sartori is right that the criterion “everybody without exception” would render democracy impossible; he implemented the principle of a limited majority (Sartori 1987).

According to Robert Reich, a fundamental change has taken place since the late 1970s: power has shifted to consumers and investors because the structure of economy has shifted toward far more competitive markets. The triumph of capitalism and the decline of democracy have been intertwined. The main criterion should be real citizenship, which is achievable by allowing individuals rather than entire companies to sue. Since citizenship can only be bestowed on individuals, corporations have neither ethical, nor logical right to legitimate participation in the democratic process (Reich 2008, 223).

With a certain level of education and global dissemination of mass information, what is badly needed is participation in political decision-making in response to the crisis, coupled with the conviction that the ruling elites have lost their legitimacy. This is a common feature of sudden political upheavals in various parts of the world, regardless of the conditions. The “de-politicisation” is a sophisticated means for the precautionary democracy: “preventing” any real change, regardless of the result of elections. Jacques Rancière would say that “exclusion” is just a different name for consensus (Rancière 1999).

The trend towards “re-politicisation” is remarkable; young people engaged in the “Occupy” movements aim to represent themselves. They have lost confidence in political elites and now claim political participation. During the roaring sixties, young people used the slogan “All power to the people”. The Black Panthers pro-

tested against the domination of society by the rich ruling class, while pro-democracy students used it to protest against America's war in Vietnam. The sentiments of the young generation were epitomised in John Lennon's famous song "Power to the People" (1971).

Nancy Fraser points out three contradictions of capitalism, the ecological, the social and the political; these, unlike with Marx, do not stem from contradictions inherent in the capitalist economy. Their effect is to incite a broad range of social struggles: not only class struggles over the nature of production, but also boundary struggles over ecology, social reproduction and political power. These boundary struggles decisively shape the structure of capitalist societies. The social, the political and the ecological are non-economic orders which make commodity production possible (Fraser 2014, 68–69). The boundary struggle incorporates the conflictual process of constitution of social actors, who in fact oppose the depoliticisation.

Self-government (framed by Marx) is not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. An attempt at self-government presents a *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence. This famous quotation from the German Ideology has been slightly modified; I have replaced the term "communism" with "self-government".

In his time, Marx fiercely condemned anarchists. He held a dispute with Bakunin, who stuck to the supremacy of politics. This is why the principal goal of revolution ought to be the implementation of self-government, not the expropriation of the means of production. Marx believed in a soon victory of the revolution, and the confidence of anarchists reflected as an impediment to the impact of the historical inevitability. As for the idea of self-government, I would actually admit that Bakunin was right.

The historical legacy of the Paris Commune and the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917 still holds: the concept of self-governance of society in the form of participatory democracy. Of course, the crucial objection is the issue of the Bolshevik revolution and of the declared socialist construction: the results were anything but self-government. In my conference paper last year, I stressed that the pattern of French and Russian revolutions based on a savage class struggle does not represent the only way how to establish a non-capitalist society. Both revolutions had a common goal – a fundamental transformation of society, not only in France or in Russia, but worldwide. The Bolsheviks were incapable of ruling; they had no education or experience, they could maintain power only by military means and repressive terror, which resulted in the systematic elimination of the wealthy and educated classes. While there were significant differences between the Stalinist period and the post-Stalinist actually existing socialism, the principles of war

communism expressed in the denial of market incentives and persistent distrust of intelligence became entrenched.

It is a well-known fact, that in his April Theses of 1917, Lenin preached on the need to transfer “the entire state power to the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies”. Hannah Arendt is right that Lenin, primarily on economic grounds, resigned from the idea of independent political institutions; yet, although he offered free councils to the Party, unlike Stalin, he did not strive for an unlimited political power (Arendt 2006, 65–66). It is worth mentioning, that when anarchist groups tried to establish self-government in Catalonia during the Civil War in Spain in 1936, they were slaughtered by the units of Comintern devoted to Stalin. Such was also the fate of all former attempts to establish self-government, which were brutally suppressed. If the 21st century fascism prevailed, the movements for self-government would be suppressed by brutal albeit sophisticated means. Thus, to engage in “re-politicisation” actually means to engage in striving for a “democratic horizon”. Ferrara’s concept of “multiple democracies” overcomes westernisation of the idea of democracy; it is truly open to diversity.

Ferrara admits that capitalism has undergone a transformation that has revived traits of brutality typical for the earlier stages of capitalism at the onset of the Industrial Revolution. I quote: “Our own horizon for political action is the globalised world.” The story runs: could a global cosmopolitan state be achieved in spite of the civilizational differences? I would like to mention Nancy Fraser and Ulrich Beck, who are concerned with the new post-Westphalian framework of political struggle. According to Ferrara, we need a cosmopolitan rule of law because of the absence of a binding law in the relations among states. For the future of democratic horizon the assertion of the multipolar global order is crucial. There are global actors who cannot accept the successor of the Roman Empire and who are able to defend themselves by military power.

I have been fascinated by the idea of “gift giving” as a constituting element of politics as well as by the concept of equal recognition, which should not only be confined to distributive justice. Advanced anthropological research proves that there are tribes living without markets or money, without exchange or surplus product. The social order of these communities eliminates any proprietary inequality. These people are unable to calculate or attempt profit; David Graeber denominates their way of life as a culture of giving (Graeber 2006).

Ferrara picks up Shmuel Eisenstadt’s idea of specific and alternative cultural patterns. He suggests the term “interculturalism”, meaning that groups steeped in different cultures must find ways of living together without insulating themselves in the opposing enclaves. He proposes an optimistic vision: the opening up of democracy to a new post- or supranational dimension – deliberative democracy instead of competitive democracy. This implies engaging in a discussion about the

general interest of the common good rather than purchasing political products through voting. At this point, I am reminded of Hegel's concept of *Sittlichkeit* as interpreted and used by Axel Honneth. We need to achieve global governance with individual participation of citizens, that is, under the conditions of self-government. The world really requires plurality of cosmopolitical institutions that will have to regulate the action of large-scale global actors without relying on the ultimately physical coercion and imposition of sanctions. I admit this vision is slightly utopian, yet I am convinced that, in the long run, the "deliberative democracy" as a tool of governance ought to abolish itself to free the way to new sophisticated forms of self-governance.

I would especially like to point out Ferrara's reconstruction of multiple democratic ethos. He offers a brilliant analysis of the equivalent factors in other civilizations, being inspired by Jaspers' emphasis on simultaneous axial developments. In the same line, Ian Morris insists within the ambit of his guide to the twenty-first century that "the largely reunited Western core could bounce back like the Eastern core has done in the sixth century, and the East-West gap would narrow again" (Morris 2011, 354). By saying this, he demonstrates that, since transcultural dialogue underlies the formation of a multipolar world, without the former the emergence of the latter is impossible.

In conclusion, one remark beyond the scope of the book: We badly need a new holistic approach to transformational change. It means that the evolution of Intelligent life should transcend its currently human form. Transhumanism represents the annunciation of the contemporary Third Axial Age. I would like to add "So help us God", but since mankind has recently been unwilling to rely on God, let me conclude with "So help us the Spirit of democracy".

Ladislav Hohoš

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Ladislav Hohoš, Ph. D.

Emeritus Associated Professor

Bratislava

Slovak Republic

ladislav.hohos@gmail.com