

DEMOCRAZIA LIBERALE

Giovanni De Sio Cesari

Spesso si indica con il termine di democrazia non liberale quei regimi in cui, pure essendoci delle elezioni, tuttavia non ci sono sufficienti libertà e garanzie per le minoranze come ad esempio la Russia di Putin o la Turchia di Erdogan

Per a me sembra che la Turchia e la Russia vengano considerate democrazie o non vengono considerate tali, proprio per il fatto che esistano o meno tali garanzie. Infatti la democrazia non è caratterizzata dal consenso ma dal dissenso.

Probabilmente (direi certamente) Putin ha consenso più ampio di quanto ne abbia Conte o Trump o Macron ma questi sono considerati leader (e regimi) democratici e Putin no. Non vi è democrazia quando gli oppositori sono incarcerati, discriminati, perseguitati. Non possiamo definire questi regimi democrazie illiberali : sarebbe una contraddizione in terminis. Possiamo magari dire che esistono diversi gradi di democrazie. maggiore in Olanda, minore in Italia, bassissima in Russia riferendoci alla effettiva libertà delle opposizioni

Che senso ha quindi parlare di democrazia liberale?

In effetti liberali e democratici sono categorie ottocentesche: liberale indicava quelli che propugnavano una costituzione che limitasse il potere del re (non la sua abolizione) come Cavour e Gioberti contrapposti ai democratici che volevano abolire la monarchia e instaurare la repubblica (Mazzini) e in

prospettiva un cambiamento molto più ampio.

Gli storici mostrano che i moti del 48 fallirono proprio per il conflitto fra le due correnti.

In pratica la divisione fu superata perché in sostanza con la costituzione quasi subito il re perse ogni funzione effettiva e la differenza divenne inconsistente. Quindi si parlò di democrazia e non di stato liberale anche quando la monarchia venne conservata come nelle moderne monarchie europee. Dobbiamo poi sempre ricordare che liberale è cosa diversa da liberismo. Il liberalismo riguarda l'ordinamento politico (i diritti, come si dice) il liberismo riguarda la economia (libertà di impresa). I paesi scandinavi i più evoluti come democrazie sono stati quasi sempre governati da partiti socialisti (non liberisti) e sono anche monarchie (come pure Inghilterra, Belgio Olanda e Spagna)

Alcuni sostengono la idea che la libertà civile comporta anche il liberismo e che ambedue portano anche progresso economico e quindi a sviluppare la economia e il benessere generale. Questa tesi fu sostenuta dai cosiddetti neocom americani e applicata senza discernimento all'Iraq con risultati catastrofici

In realtà tanto il socialismo che il liberismo possono essere presenti sia in paesi democratici che in paesi dittatoriali

Ci sono regimi liberali e liberisti (Occidente in generale), regimi liberisti e non liberali (fascismo) oppure non

liberisti e liberali (socialismi democratico oppure ideale dello stato comunista). regimi ne liberali ne liberisti (comunismo reale)
Il discrimine fra liberale e non liberale viene a volte individuato dal principio di liberta che viene formulato in questi termini : la liberta di ciascuno finisce dove comincia la liberta degli altri Ma in realt  qualunque azione noi compiamo, anche la pi  banale, come scegliere fra una pizza o un panino ha sempre una sua ricaduta sociale. La comunit  allora stabilisce entro quali limiti debba essere accettata la liberta di ciascuno. Questo avviene che ci sia o meno democrazia anche se nelle democrazie il

marginare   molto pi  ampio Ricordo che la liberta religiosa, la prima e la madre di tutte le liberta all'inizio (Locke) escludeva cattolici e atei e limitata a correnti protestanti (anglicani e calvinisti in pratica)- Quello che   cambiato ad esempio per gli omosessualit  non   l'idea di liberta ma la sua percezione : non pi  una corruzione viziosa e vergognosa ma un diverso modo di manifestarsi della sessualit  (alternativa, di minoranza)

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IS IN CRISIS. BUT ... DO WE KNOW WHAT IT IS?

by [Helena Rosenblatt](#)

It was 25 years ago that Fareed Zakaria warned against a new and growing threat: the rise of "illiberal democracy" around the world. Democratically elected governments were routinely flouting liberal principles, openly violating the rule of law, and depriving their citizens of basic rights and liberties.

Today, many believe that we stand on the precipice of an existential crisis. Liberal democracy is "closer to collapse than we may wish to believe", writes Ed Luce of the Financial Times. In a bracing new book, the former secretary of state

Madeleine Albright even warns of a revival of fascism.

There is a growing consensus that American democracy itself is at risk. The Economist's index categorizes the United States as a "flawed democracy". There is a danger within: Americans are becoming complacent about democracy, losing interest in their traditional ideals. Liberalism has failed, writes Patrick Deneen. The problem, says David Brooks of the New York Times, is that liberals have forgotten how to defend their "liberal democratic values". They must go back to first

principles; they must remember “the canon of liberal democracy”.

The trouble is that we don't really know what liberal democracy is. A spate of books, articles and opinion pieces talk about its demise, but their authors speak past each other or around in circles, because they are using different definitions of the term. Ed Luce defines liberalism one way, David Brooks another and Patrick Deneen yet another. How can we have a proper discussion about liberal democracy when we are not speaking about the same thing?

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The problem concerns more than semantics. The confusion of terms leads to confused thinking. It impairs liberals' understanding of their own principles and weakens their politics. Their opponents easily exploit the verbal ambiguities. It is high time, therefore, that we clarify what the term “liberal democracy” means and what it stands for. For this we need to understand its history.

One common mistake is to conflate liberalism with democracy. The two concepts are not synonyms. For

most of their history, they have not even been compatible. From the time of the ancient Greeks, “democracy” has meant “rule by the people”. Some have interpreted this to mean direct political participation by all male citizens. Others have taken it to mean a representative system based on the suffrage of all male citizens. Either way, however, well into the 19th century, the majority of liberals were hostile to the very idea of democracy, which they associated with chaos and mob rule. It is hard to find a liberal who was enthusiastic about democracy during the heyday of what is often called “classical liberalism”. Indeed, it would not be wrong to say that liberalism was originally invented to contain democracy.

Certainly, the founders of liberalism were no democrats. Benjamin Constant stood for strict property qualifications for both voting and officeholding. The French revolution proved to liberals like him that the public was utterly unprepared for political rights. People were ignorant, irrational and prone to violence. Under their pressure, the rule of law had been suspended, “enemies of the people” guillotined, rights trampled upon. The most democratic phase of the revolution had also been the most bloody.

Napoleon's despotism, which was legitimized repeatedly by plebiscites

based on universal male suffrage, only confirmed the liberals' apprehensions about democracy. The emperor's popularity demonstrated in no uncertain terms that French citizens had an unhealthy predilection for authoritarian rulers and were fatally susceptible to propaganda. New words were invented to name his pseudo-democratic regime. Some called it "democratic despotism". Others used the terms "Bonapartism" or "Caesarism". Constant called it "usurpation". "Usurpers" are constantly compelled to justify their positions, so they use lies and propaganda to manufacture support. They form alliances with religious authorities to prop up their regimes. They take their countries into useless wars to distract people from their treachery, while they enhance their own power, line their own pockets and enrich their friends. Worst of all, they corrupt their people by tricking them into participating in their lies.

Alexis de Tocqueville also had deep misgivings about democracy. Two additional French revolutions, one in 1830 and the other in 1848, followed by another Napoleon, depressed him greatly. It proved once again that the masses were easy prey for demagogues and would-be dictators catering to their lowest instincts. Democracy fostered a pernicious

form individualism, another word for selfishness in Tocqueville's lexicon.

Early liberals like Constant and Tocqueville spent much time thinking about how to counter the perils of democracy. Limits had to be placed on the sovereignty of the people, the rule of law and individual rights guaranteed. But good laws would never be enough, since a popular strongman could easily pervert or simply ignore them. The survival of liberal democracies required a politically educated citizenry. Constant travelled around France instructing French citizens about the principles of their constitution, their rights and their duties. He published articles and delivered speeches for the same purpose. He fought valiantly for the freedom of the press.

Both men also believed that the survival of a liberal democracy depended on certain moral values. It required public spiritedness and a sense of community. Tocqueville thought deeply about fostering "public morality" and "public virtue". Constant agonized over the political complacency, moral apathy, and selfishness that he saw all around him. Only dictators profited from such vices.

How to counter the moral degradation? They thought about this as well. The commitment of public-spirited elites was essential. “The enlightened classes” and “well-meaning men” must be the “missionaries of truth”, wrote Constant. They must redouble their efforts to counter the cynicism that was turning people away from the public good. As Tocqueville said, it was essential to “educate democracy.” And this, he said, was “the primary duty imposed on the leaders of society today”.

It is a sad sign of the times that such statements sound so naive or ring hollow today. The truth is that we still have much to learn from the founding fathers of liberalism, who lived through an existential crisis of their own. They knew about the tendency that democracies have to become illiberal. Let us heed their lessons.

- **Helena Rosenblatt is professor of history at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She is the author of the forthcoming book, The Lost History of Liberalism: From Ancient Rome to the Twenty-First Century.**

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