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“Surviving but not Governing... Intellectuals in Italy’s Second Republic”

On this 67th anniversary of Italy’s “Festa di Liberazione,” Nadia Urbinati addresses the ideologies of intellectuals in Italy’s second republic. She first explores models of democracy starting from ancient times and moves to the intellectual models of today. From her chapter “Democratic Politics and the Lovers of Truth,” published in a book titled *Truth and Democracy* (ed. Jeremy Elkins and Andrew Norris, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), Urbinati presents the idea that philosophy and democracy have been hardly friends because philosophers never truly loved a political system that, like democracy, relies upon opinions, rather than truth or competence or virtue. Yet despite difficult relationships with democracy, we owe our early knowledge of democracy precisely to its critics, namely Athenian philosophers. Did modernity sanctify the relationship of truth and democracy? Not really, although the latter has become the safest place for freedom of thought. Indeed, philosophers started respecting democracy because, thanks to constitutional limitation and the bill of rights, it engenders the possibility for the people to progress from prejudices to knowledge. The renaissance of democracy in the age of the enlightenment has thus coincided with philosophy’s hidden hope that democracy will be transformed into a regime whose procedures bring about correct decisions, thus good not simply politically legitimate decisions. In the long run –this has been philosophers’ hope-- this free market of ideas would be able to make all democratically searching for truth.

A free market of ideas would affect a citizen’s mind more than procedural correctness of decision making process and more than voting. The goal of this utopia is that of reaching a consensus that conquers people’s conviction with no need of counting votes. Beneath the goal of making democracy a deliberative regime, the idea still lingers that democracy is more than a process of decision making and more than a political system; that means looking for a deeper unification of ideas and values - a hegemonic unity of the masses.

These ideal has shaped both progressive and a revolutionary politics. Progress and revolution are alike in that they aspire to the same result with the belief that existing society is organized incorrectly and needs to be amended. Of course strategies of implementation – progressive or revolutionary -- are different and thus ideas of liberation are different. For some, democratic equality needs to also promote social and economic equality, but for others political equality can be attaining social and economic inequality. However, both reformist and revolutionaries believe in emancipation from prejudices and containing inequalities. These views shape the view of democracy in contemporary

theory. How can a regime based on opinion be led to want to create a good society? Can truth and opinion come to reconciliation? Let us go back again to the ancient philosophers.

Socrates critiqued the practices of sophists by claiming sophists did not contribute in forming a critical mind of the individual citizens. To sophists, society was characterized by entrepreneurship, competition in speech and winning majority in assembly, cost and benefit reasoning, and full immersion in politics. They educated the youth according to these moral and ethical values. Socrates claimed that the sophists did not contemplate any distance between the mind of the individual and politics. He wanted to educate his young interlocutors to keep a distance from the crowd, and in the justification of what was right and wrong, he taught the individual to be responsible toward the public by being true to herself. This friendly tension between the opinion of the crowd and one's judgment is crucial to understand the role of intellectuals in democratic politics.

Sophists thought that democracy was not about making competent decisions. Popular assemblies did not decide how to build a ship, but whether or not a ship needed to be built. Once the decision was made, then the assembly delegated an expert to build the ship. This a key point in what characterizes the role of the intellectuals and moreover it suggests the existence of four types of intellectual thinking. The first is that of the philosophers: the seekers of the truth or uncompromised reasoning, outside the interest of everyday life. The second is that of the Sophists, or the seekers of victory, in a contest, electoral campaign or jury. Then follows the ordinary citizens who make decisions based on their own individual opinion or judgment. Finally, the technicians, those who have specific knowledge that can be employed for the good of the city, like finances or carpentry.

These four kinds of thinking when we talk about the role of intellectuals in modern society. In the middle of the Cold War, in 1954, Luigi Einaudi dedicated an interesting analysis to these four types of intellectuals and how they may interact in a political community or a constitutional democracy. 1) Theoreticians, who give us some visions thanks to which we try to elaborate answers to the problems of our time. We need to know past, present, and be thoughtful of the future with knowledge and principles, both ethical and political, which are contained in our constitution. 2) Technicians, who have acquired a specific skill or knowledge. 3) Political leaders or leaders of parties, who have the task of forming popular opinions in order to make people accept hard choices, if needed. They create opinions that support the work of the theoreticians. 4) Doctrinaires or those who have their own view or a dogmatic direction of thinking that tells them immediately where to look, what to do and what to think.

Einaudi defined the doctrinaires as holding two opposite ideologies: "social-ist" and "liber-ist". The end of the age of ideology corresponded to the end of the former, and the growing success of the latter. An important difference between the two doctrinaires is that while the social-ist doctrine merged together the doctrinaires and theorists, the liber-ist combines together doctrinaires and technicians. To apply Einaudi's scheme, we may say that Italy today, at the end of what was called the second republic, is an expression of the following: the ruling owner of liberalist doctrine plus the governing rule of financial technicians results in the masses not needing to be convinced by parties to support the popular choices that government has to make. This doctrine does not look to future, and instead is framed in the language of necessity, the fabric of society.

Intellectuals do govern in this phase of Italian democracy, but they are not the theoreticians, as Einaudi hoped. The disappearance of the theoreticians is perhaps the problem for democracy today. Italy has technicians and doctrinaires without the parties playing the role of forming political discourse and opinion. Citizens are convinced by the supposed language of "necessity" of economics

and they have not to be convinced to attain some ideals in the future. There is nothing to attain actually, safe survival, which wants the language of necessity and the presence, not possibility and the future.

Some years after Einaudi, Norberto Bobbio described also 4 types of intellectuals in politics: one type wants to lead the masses, another is driven by needs of community, another is completely outside the community because devoted to the truth, and the last, much like with Einaudi's "theoretician" acts like an intellectual gadfly focusing on the issues that most interest the community and criticizing solutions and decisions from the point of view of the basic principles of liberty and justice contained in the constitution. This intellectual –the Socratic one—creates a healthy distance between the mind of community and the mind of the citizen. This type of intellectual is in decline today, not because of the hegemony of the "social-ist" doctrinaire but because of the hegemony of the "liber-ist" doctrinaire. Yet we may need this critical type in a democratic community that is based on opinion and whose procedures are not meant so as to achieve true decisions, but simply decisions that the majority prefers. Democracy is based on majority rule because is based on opinion. Precisely because of this democracy needs critical minds that do not subvert it in the name of superior goals or visions, but challenges it in the name of its founding principles, which claims individual citizens to be equal in political power and free to form and express their opinions.