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The End of Liberal Democracy
as We have Known It?

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Abstract

The theoretical fault-lines in liberal democratic theory have always been located in at least two important sites: that of process or procedure, and that of outcome. As to the former, the problem has been that of trying to ensure that the »will of the people« – or at least of the relevant people, the eligible voters – gets to be expressed through meaningful, practical mechanisms. According to the consensus shared by most mainstream liberal democratic theorists of the recent past, elections to representative bodies and subsequent votes by the winners of these elections are such mechanisms. But of course at every turn we constantly find instances of elected governments thwarting the majority views of the same body of individuals by which they were originally elected.

Liberal democratic theory says that, as long as the appropriate procedures for manifesting the majority (or, in some instances, mere plurality) will of the people concerning who is to represent them were followed, then the representatives are justified in voting against the apparent will of the people. But this is a clear practical contradiction.

As for the the question of outcome, here recent liberal democratic theory has dug an even deeper hole for itself by abandoning the notion of a common good, to which at least some earlier theorists in this tradition still subscribed.

Liberal democratic theory has ultimately denied itself any critical function with respect to outcomes. Instead, it is forced to ratify every outcome, however clearly misguided or even tragic it may be, as long as it is the product of the accepted authoritative set of procedures and institutions. Surely the new theoretical direction will need to come to grips with all the elements mostly absent from the Rawlsian approach and from the writings of most of Rawls' liberal democratic fellow travelers: power, violence, domination, ideology, decision, interpretation, political expression, revolution, history, economy, biopolitics.

New models for social and political philosophy are desperately needed!

My title is deliberately ambiguous, and it is so in at least two ways. First, there is the question mark at the end; this always makes for ambiguity. It can mean that the writer/speaker is himself or herself not sure, or that he or she *is* sure, one way or the other – that is, yes or no on the issue – but wants coyly to conceal this certainty at the beginning and then lead the reader/listener along a path of persuasion. Secondly, there is ambiguity in the expression, »liberal democracy«: it can obviously mean liberal democracy as a set of practices – the exact delineation of which, as I shall be attempting to remind you, is itself very far from clear – but it can also mean liberal democracy as a theory. So, let me begin by clarifying these ambiguities.

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ties: First, am I not sure about the purported demise of liberal democracy, or am I sure but just being coy? Answer: I'm not sure which. Second, do I mean liberal democracy as a set of practices, or liberal democracy as a theory? Answer: I mean both.

Then there is yet another, quite classic ambiguity in my title: Who are »we«? We Croats? We erstwhile citizens of a nation called Yugoslavia? We Americans? We West Europeans + Americans? We West Europeans + Americans + Central Europeans? We cosmopolitan internationalists? We philosophers of the world? I don't know; *we* will see.

Among the better-known, and also more creative, theorists associated with ideals of liberal democracy over the past half-century has been Robert Dahl, Sterling Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Yale University. Among his by now less well remembered publications is *After the Revolution?*, a small volume written at a time of revolution-talk in the world at large – as everyone knows, the key year for this was 1968 – and even, in its own small way, at Yale. Among those who paraded through Yale during those years were, among others, Bill Clinton – who, as was recently called to my attention by a friend who saw my name mentioned in Bill's autobiography, took a graduate course on natural law and philosophy that I taught –, Hilary Clinton, John Kerry, John Dean, Shrub (the lesser Bush), and, as I have already indicated, myself. Thus the fact that the most sacred Yale song ends with the words, »For God, for country, and for Yale« may not be quite as good an example of the word, »anti-climactic,« as one English-language dictionary says it is. By the time Dahl's book was published, revolutionary fervor had already subsided to such an extent that, as I remarked somewhere, the question mark at the end of his title might just as well be dropped. (Perhaps the same should be said concerning the question mark at the end of my title for this paper; *we* will see.)

On page 4 of *After the Revolution?*, Dahl makes the following very wise comment, to which I take no serious exception:

»(B)ecause democracy has never been fully achieved, it has always been and is now a potentially revolutionary doctrine. For every system purporting to be democratic is vulnerable to the charge that it is not democratic enough, or is not 'really' or fully democratic. The charge is bound to be correct, since no polity has ever been completely democratized.«¹

The other citation that I would like to make from this book comes later. It reflects, above all, the feelings of intense anger and frustration that even politically moderate American intellectuals had come to have concerning their government's war against Vietnam. Here it is:

»The greatest obstacle to democratization and reducing inequalities in the United States is not that bugbear with which the Left, old and new, is invariably so obsessed, an elite of wealthy men, or even that military-industrial complex so much referred to these days, but rather the military-industrial-labor-farming-educational-professional-consumer-over and under thirty-lower/middle/upper class complex that, for want of a more appropriate name, might be called the American people.«²

It is now confession time for me. I chided Robert Dahl for writing these words. I commented, first, that his remarks about the radical tradition, his lumping together of the old and new Left and his associating both with a vulgar conspiratorial view of history, amounted to a truly unjustifiable oversimplification. I do not regret having said that. But I then went on, in addition, to criticize him for proposing what I called a »universal conspiracy theory«, which assumed that the millions of Americans who had, accord-

ing to polls, supported the United States government's war against Vietnam were sufficiently well informed to make a genuine »personal choice« concerning that policy. (»Personal choice« is the first of three criteria for legitimate authority that Dahl lists in *After the Revolution?*, the others being competence and efficiency.) Although I do not think that my theoretical point about personal choice was incorrect, I do now regret having taken Professor Dahl to task for his disgust with the American people. I now realize, in light of more recent events, that he was right to be so disgusted, and I was wrong to chide him for this. I am very sorry, Bob!

Where, the reader may be asking him- or herself, did I do this chiding in the first place, or make the previously-mentioned suggestion about dropping the question mark in the title? Was it only in my mind? No, it was also on paper. I wrote a book-length manuscript entitled *In Vindication of Revolutionary Ideals: A Reply to Professor Dahl*, for which I had received initial encouragement from the Yale University Press and, once I had submitted it, was accorded what in his own words to me was a »glowing« review by Shlomo Avineri, whom they had asked to be its reader. But it was never published in English and became part of a very long debacle, by no means the only debacle in my life, that led to my eventually leaving Yale for the position that I have held since then.

The reader will have noted, if he or she has been attentive, that I said »in English«. In what, if any, other language might this work of mine eventually have been published? The reader would have been correct if he or she had answered »Norwegian«. My criticisms, somewhat abridged and not in fact including the paragraph in which I made my criticism of Dahl's attack on the American people, were finally published in Oslo, in 1980, along with a reply to me by Dahl and my reply to him and his final reply to me, under the title *Demokrati og autoritet*. It is a little-known classic – very little known indeed – of twentieth century political theory.

In the same part of my »Anti-Dahl«, as it has been called, there is another passage that *did* appear in the translation, on p. 67, and that I continue to this day to ponder: do I or do I not believe what I wrote there? It refers to the time of escalation of the Vietnam conflict, beginning after the American Presidential elections of 1964, and harkens back to Dahl's analysis, with which I was and am sympathetic, of the disastrous decision made by the Athenian democracy, as reported by Thucydides, to launch an expedition against Syracuse. The text that I wish to cite constitutes only the second half of a very long sentence in English, whereas it is broken up into three sentences in Norwegian. So I will cite the Norwegian text, which is obviously much better stylistically than the English original:

»Min konklusjon må bli at det ville ha vært bedre både for USA og resten av verden om en liten, men forstandig gruppe på et tidlig tidspunkt hadde grepet inn og omgjort regjeringens beslutninger. De måtte ha anvendt midler som lå utenfor de vanlige politiske beslutningsprosessene som angivelig er basert på 'Personlig valg'. De måtte kort sagt ha grepet inn ved hjelp av revolusjonær taktikk.«³

For those who may not not understand Norwegian, here is the English original:

¹ Robert A. Dahl, *After the Revolution?*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1970, p. 4.

² *Ibid.*, p. 110.

³ Bernt Hagtvet (ed.): William L McBride and Robert A. Dahl, *Demokrati og autoritet: En debatt om deltakelse, tvang og revolusjonære idealer i moderne demokratier*, Dreyer, Oslo 1980, p. 67.

»It would have been better, I conclude, if a small but clear-headed group had succeeded at an early point in reversing the government's decisions by means external to those American institutional procedures that are supposedly based on 'Personal choice' – in short, by revolutionary tactics.«

I went on to say that something like this did in fact occur, namely, the protest demonstrations of subsequent years, when one heard all the talk about the need for revolution that led to Dahl's writing his book.

This is an eternally-recurring issue in political theory, and particularly in democratic political theory – understanding »democratic« in the broadest possible sense, meaning rule (in whatever forms it may be exercised) by »the many«. Which is more important: that there be universal, or nearly universal, participation in governance processes by the citizens, or that the outcome of government policy decisions be one that is in their long-term best interest? In order to believe that these two options always coincide, one would have to be either a liar or else a dogmatic believer in the proposition that whatever a majority of the people say they wish at any given time is always, *eo ipso*, right. And yet that form of democratic theory known as liberal democratic theory, or simply classical liberalism, going back at least as far as Locke and forward through Mill to the present time, at least makes the tacit assumption, if not the dogmatic assertion, that majority rule will ultimately produce the best realistically possible outcome.

The principal home of political liberalism is the West European cultural world, which of course includes North America and Australia. Despite some doubts based on messy past historical facts such as American slavery, European colonialism, and the capitulation of the Weimar Republic, the theorists who have embodied this tradition have generally been able, at least until recently, to live in a rarified, self-congratulatory atmosphere within which they know that their ways – that is, the trappings of elections, parliaments and assemblies, representative government in general – are the best ways and the ways that must ultimately prevail in this good world that is ours. Of course it has always been admitted that corruption can enter into these processes to subvert them – elections can be bought, special interests can exert undue influence over assemblies, and so on – but it has been assumed that with sufficient reforms, vigorously undertaken, such aberrations will be corrected. The electoral process in the State of Florida in the year 2000 and its bizarre resolution by the Courts could be seen to have constituted another aberration, one that permitted some of us to call Shrub simply the »*de facto*« President, the legitimacy of whose Presidency was in serious doubt.

But the four years since his installation in office have raised even more serious doubts about the institutions of liberal democracy themselves. The destruction of the so-called »Twin Towers« in New York precipitated a series of events that would, for the most part, have gladdened the hearts of the attackers, if any of them had lived. In the name of saving and even extending liberal democracy, a number of its traditional practices and institutions, such as they were, on both domestic and international levels were undermined, in ways too well known and too numerous to mention, by the United States Administration. Then at last came the opportunity, in the elections of 2004, for the American people to renounce proto-fascism by voting against the President and his party. True, there were many instances, once again, of voting manipulation and of massive infusions of funds by special interests in order to try to purchase the outcome that they de-

sired, namely, the hitherto *de facto* President's first »legitimate« national election victory. True, the mass media and the newer forms of communication, such as bloggers' websites, were filled with invective, distortions, and outright lies. But to most of us, alas, the final outcome, as close as it was, does not seem attributable in the last analysis to fraud and aberrant deployment of the system in the way in which one could easily say this concerning the events of the year 2000.

The reaction to what happened has been, on the one side, a spirit of triumphalism, and on the other side a sense of deep depression and anger, creating a division such as has perhaps not been experienced to the same depth in my country since the mid-nineteenth century. Particularly in light of the apparently almost exceptionless disapprobation of the principal policies and stances of this same American administration by large popular majorities in the rest of the world, one is strongly tempted to agree with Dahl's words concerning the American people during the Vietnam era. I have thus far seen no analysis of the putative reasons for the outcome – Christian religious zealotry, lack of information, the power of the incumbency, insufficient funds on the side of the opposition Democratic Party, unattractiveness of its own candidate, etc., etc. – that seems truly persuasive, truly explanatory. Perhaps the most likely route to an explanation is the general one that was followed by Natalija Mićunović in her analysis of Serbian nationalism, along lines of group psychology with psychiatrically pathological elements. The combination of intensely nationalistic self-love and deep, irrational fear within large segments of the American population is very real. And yet to insist exclusively on this does not seem to me quite adequate, quite fully explanatory, either.

So perhaps we should take another look at trends in political philosophy, the *thème de base* of the conference for which I originally prepared this paper,** for some clues concerning the subversion of liberal democracy by those who are most loudly proclaiming themselves its champions. I would like to begin this part of my article by returning to the focus of my paper given at this same conference four years earlier, i.e. – John Rawls. For it seems to me that the liberal current of thought has suffered a loss of faith, the result of which at the present time is that it is on the verge of a quite considerable transformation, and that this change is clearly visible in the evolution of Rawls's own thought. From the theory of justice advanced in his first book, where one senses a certain confidence in its being, all things considered, the best such theory (at least for modern societies), there was a definite retreat in his *Political Liberalism* and other works published later. To put it simply, he no longer claimed, in the latter, to be giving us a theory of universal import; now, according to him, it was simply a matter of a purely »political« solution, with no »metaphysical« ambitions, to the problems created by the existence, in large modern societies, of a number of groups with »comprehensive«, non-liberal, sets of beliefs. (Rawls became virtually obsessed by religions with fundamentalist tendencies.) Regarded in this way, political liberalism is therefore little more than a means of allowing for the peaceful coexistence, in any given society, of such groups with one another and with others. Finally, in the small volume of his last

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cal and Modern Social and Political Philosophy. Models, Problems, and Trends«.

years, *The Law of Peoples*, Rawls complacently accepted the extreme and ever-increasing global division between the rich and the poor, to which he refused to apply his own principles of justice, and he created a sort of worldwide bestiary of his private devising, in which one finds good liberal societies such as his own, »decent« hierarchical societies of lesser value but with which, nevertheless, »we« should be able to coexist, and lastly bad, outlaw states. Although we may be struck by the banality and naïveté of this »vision«, I believe that it is merely a rather faithful reflection of the oppressive mystification that characterizes the current Western political world, where the American President, who was first »elected« under the circumstances that I have recalled, claims to be spreading justice and freedom while everywhere reinforcing the capitalist military and police state. In this atmosphere, the very word »liberalism« becomes suspect, and elections begin increasingly to be regarded as, to coin a phrase taken from the title of a late essay by Jean-Paul Sartre, a »trap for fools«.⁴

The philosophical reaction against Rawlsism that is beginning and that I share is rather well captured in the following text, which comes near the end of a review, by Martin Schnell, of some of Rawls' books in German translation:

»Es ist eigentlich erstaunlich, dass Rawls ausgerechnet als moderner Klassiker der politischen Philosophie angesehen wird. Erstaunlich, weil Rawls' Texte eines bewisen: Unkenntnis vom Politischen! Rawls verfügt über eine normative Ethik. Das ist alles. Was sagt diese Ethik zu Begriffen und Sachen wie Macht, Gewalt, Herrschaft, Ideologie, Entscheidung, Interpretation, politischer Ausdruck, Revolution, Geschichte, Ökonomie, Biopolitik? Nichts oder fast Nichts! Rawls, der sich als Nachfahre Kants versteht, stellt sich den politischen Prozess wie ein Student aus Neuengland vor. Nämlich als Anwendung von Regeln, die dem gesunden Menschenverstand der oberen Mittelschicht unmittelbar plausibel sind. Die Unterbestimmung des Politischen hat darin wohl ihre Hauptursache.«⁵

But it is not just Rawls who is included in this reaction: it is an entire theoretical literature that in the last analysis has turned out to be complicitous with the, so to speak, »real liberal democracies« (I am drawing a parallel with the former so-called »really existing socialisms«), arrogant and domination-minded, the practices and pretensions of which have come under so much scrutiny in the wake of recent events. This literature has been most complicitous, of course, with the most real/most unreal liberal democracy of all, the United States.

The theoretical fault-lines in liberal democratic theory have always been located in at least two important sites: that of process or procedure, and that of outcome. As to the former, the problem has been that of trying to ensure that the »will of the people« – or at least of the relevant people, the eligible voters, the precise identity of which creates a further, overwhelming problem to which I shall return later – gets to be expressed through meaningful, practical mechanisms. According to the consensus shared by most mainstream liberal democratic theorists of the recent past, elections to representative bodies and subsequent votes by the winners of these elections are such mechanisms. But of course, at every turn we constantly find instances of elected governments thwarting the majority views of the same body of individuals by which they were originally elected. For example, right now Shrub is insisting on the destruction of the national American pension system, called social security, as we have known it since the 1930s, and yet polls show large majorities, much larger than that by which he and his party won the elections in November, to be opposed to this. Of course,

these sentiments could change. But I offer it as a simple current example of my point, which surely does not need to be elaborated. Liberal democratic theory says that, as long as the appropriate procedures for manifesting the majority (or, in some instances, mere plurality) will of the people concerning who is to represent them were followed, then the representatives are justified in voting against the apparent will of the people. But this is a clear practical contradiction.

As for the the question of outcome, here recent liberal democratic theory has dug an even deeper hole for itself by abandoning the notion of a common good, to which at least some earlier theorists in this tradition still subscribed. Rawls makes this move very conspicuously in *A Theory of Justice*, insisting on a purely individualistic conception of »the good«. But by refusing to accept as potentially valid or determinative any argument to the effect that the current preferences of the majority might be harmful to the long-range best interest, or common good, of the society in question – as in the Syracuse and Vietnam cases, for example – and taking Dahl’s notion of »personal preference«, here and now, as an ultimate criterion for political authority, liberal democratic theory has ultimately denied itself any critical function with respect to outcomes. Instead, it is forced to ratify every outcome, however clearly misguided or even tragic it may be, as long as it is the product of the accepted authoritative set of procedures and institutions.

Finally, liberal democratic theorists have, almost without exception, accepted some version of the oxymoron known as »liberal nationalism«. Liberalism is committed in principle to a sense of universality, famously expressed in John Locke’s assertion that »a child is born a subject of no country or government«, which is in essence the same as Rousseau’s »L’homme est né libre«. Yet theorists such as Rawls typically dismiss out of hand all challenges to the systems of exclusivity and restricted immigration rights that characterize, in one form or another, all countries in the world today. As the author of a very cogent study of this issue, Phillip Coles, says at the conclusion of his book, *Philosophies of Exclusion. Liberal Political Theory and Immigration*:

»(A)t the beginning of this book... I asked whether liberal political philosophy could answer the membership question in terms that were consistent with its central moral principles and commitments, and I have suggested that the answer to this question is that it cannot. Any solution that has been offered to justify exclusive membership – and therefore immigration and naturalisation regulations – has given rise to an incoherence between the liberal polity’s internal and external principles: those within its boundaries are subject to liberal principles and practices, while those at the border are subjected to illiberal principles and practices.«⁶

These deep fault lines have always existed just below the surface of the theoretical perspective in question. A serious intellectual challenge was presented to it by Marxism, but eventually the collapse of most regimes

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Jean-Paul Sartre, »Élections, piège à cons«, in: *Situations*, X, Gallimard, Paris 1976, pp. 75–87.

5
Martin M. Schnell, »Sammelrezension: Rawls und die Unterbestimmung des Politischen«, *Journal für die Phänomenologie*, Wien (21/2004), p. 73.

6
Phillip Coles, *Philosophies of Exclusion. Liberal Political Theory and Immigration*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2000, p. 202.

calling themselves Marxist helped to sap Marxism's theoretical appeal – whether fairly or unfairly is another question. In a sense, I am claiming that a comparable undermining is beginning to occur today with respect to liberal democratic theory, whether or not altogether fairly, as a result above all of the blatant hypocrisy and internal contradictions of the superpower that calls itself liberal democratic. This is occurring at the same time as appeals to the spirit of democracy as such, occurring in such varied forms as the recent demonstrations in Kiev and Beirut and the gigantic anti-globalization conference in Porto Alegre, are raising a few new hopes, here and there, for a better world. As always, there is much that is cloudy and unclear in the current global situation. But we may eventually see emerging new, less hypocritical and militaristic, more human rights-friendly, and perhaps also more cosmopolitan forms of sociopolitical organization around the world. If, as is already beginning to happen, the present American Administration begins to try to take credit for such developments, it will in a certain sense be justified in doing so, but primarily in accordance with dialectical principles; that is, observing the old self-styled liberal democracy come to grief as a neo-fascist police state may be helping to stimulate the quest for new, more coherent and more inclusive forms of democracy, ultimately to be extended to a worldwide scale in accordance with the principle that those who are affected by policies should have a right to participate in shaping and either ratifying or repudiating them. I mean, who in this world is not a potential stakeholder – to borrow a buzzword from the field of business ethics – in the results of American militarism and military practices? Should not everyone, therefore, have a right to participate, at least in some small way, in reshaping the policies that have produced them?

Surely the new theoretical direction will need to come to grips with all the elements listed by Martin Schnell as mostly absent from the Rawlsian approach and, as I added, from the writings of most of Rawls' liberal democratic fellow travelers: power, violence, domination, ideology, decision, interpretation, political expression, revolution, history, economy, biopolitics. Along similar lines, the new direction will need to pay more attention to the kinds of study that I listed at the end of my bitter, but unfortunately prescient, paper given at the same conference three years ago as the one at which this present paper was first presented, entitled »Political Philosophy, One World, and Superpower Patriotism«, namely: (1) the problem of a single power that claims to own our world and to have the right to make decisions about whom to attack, and when, whom to declare subversive and whom not, entirely on its own if and whenever it is so inclined; (2) the problem of new forms of totalitarianism in the name of »zero tolerance« against terrorists; (3) the issue of despotic tendencies to suppress even long-established and internationally-recognized rights and rules – the words »Abu Ghraib« have since become parts of our vocabularies as one horrible instantiation of such tendencies – in the name of a newly closed society; (4) war studies as complements to existing peace studies, though not substitutes for them, since the latter, however utopian they may be today, still retain subversive potential (as recently demonstrated once again by public attacks on peace studies programs in my own home State of Indiana by a right-wing zealot with a national following named David Horowitz); and (5) the issue of superpower patriotism itself, of a militarily gigantesque country filled with millions of self-congratulatory nationalist cheerleaders who are convinced that they are »Number One« in every important

way, and that all others are simply wrong. As I said in the penultimate paragraph of that paper:

»The directions that I am proposing for a political philosophy that is in touch with our times are subversive, of course, because in most respects they are based on a view of the world that contradicts the official story. ‘We’ are still *supposed* to be democratic, rights-respecting, freedom-loving, and even peace-loving; as has been pointed out, Bush has defended his talk of unending war on grounds of self-defense. For Western philosophers today to point out the hypocrisy of this is akin to the position in which philosophers in the former Eastern Bloc found themselves when they argued that alienation still existed under socialism. It is clear that there are many in power in the West who would love to suppress dissent. As my story [about a philosopher who refused to engage in public criticism of an American training camp for South American military personnel, lest she be found guilty of violating the so-called ‘Patriot Act’] illustrates, they have already taken the first steps in the direction of doing so.«

Further steps have since been taken. One recent illustration that comes immediately to mind is the prosecution of a veteran New York lawyer who had represented a radical Egyptian cleric at his trial and who had violated an agreement not to broadcast any of his statements, made in prison, to his followers back in the Middle East. She violated an agreement and *might*, according to past practices, have been reprimanded by the association of professional lawyers; but instead the United States government charged her with subversion, a crime punishable by many years in prison, and obtained a conviction from a complacent jury – and this in New York, not in Texas. Another recent illustration, this time not from the United States, is the very severe anti-terrorist law, allowing long-term incarceration without trial and the suppression of a number of other heretofore accepted rights, that Prime Minister Blair has been pushing through the British Parliament.

In short, the old supposed bastion of liberal democratic practice, the United States, along with some other countries in its orbit, is changing its character and succumbing, little by little, to forces of reaction; a single party, which is itself moving ever further toward the Right, controls all the branches of government at the federal level. The bland, hopeful tolerance of old liberal democratic theory with respect to what Coles termed »internal principles« – a tolerance that is well illustrated by Rawls’ conception of political liberalism as the coexistence, on the level of practice, of groups holding clashing »comprehensive doctrines« – is no match for the hard reality of a »zero tolerance« mentality that has come to prevail, while in their »external principles« most avatars of that same theory have always been more complicitous than not with the imperialism of the leading self-styled liberal democracies. As the call for papers for the conference at which these remarks were first presented implies, new models are desperately needed!

W. L. McBride

Das Ende der liberalen Demokratie wie wir sie gekannt haben?

Theoretisch befanden sich die falschen Linien in der Theorie der liberalen Demokratie schon immer an mindestens zwei wichtigen Stellen: im Prozess oder Prozedere und im Resultat. Was das Erste betrifft, so bestand das Problem darin, dass versucht wurde sicherzustellen, dass der »Wille des Volkes« – oder zumindest der der relevanten Menschen, der wählbaren Wähler – durch anschauliche, praktische Mechanismen zum Ausdruck kommt. Entsprechend dem Konsens der bedeutendsten Theoretiker der liberalen Demokratie in der neueren Vergangenheit gelten als solche Mechanismen die Wahlen für Repräsentativorgane und die nachfolgenden Stimmen der Wahlsieger. Doch auf jedem Schritt stoßen wir auf Instanzen der gewählten Regierungen, die die Mehrheitsansichten desselben Personenkreises, von dem sie ursprünglich gewählt worden waren, preisgeben. Die Theorie der liberalen Demokratie besagt, dass solange angebrachte Verfahren zum Ausdruck des Willens der Mehrheit angewandt werden (oder in einigen Fällen, der bloßen Mehrzahl) im Hinblick darauf, wer sie vertreten soll, die Vertreter berechtigt sind, gegen den manifesten Willen des Volkes zu stimmen. Doch dies ist natürlich ein offensichtlicher Widerspruch. Was die Frage der Resultate betrifft, so hat sich die neueste Theorie der liberalen Demokratie eine noch tiefere Grube gegraben, da sie sich vom Begriff des Allgemeinwohls abgewandt hat, zu dem zumindest einige frühere Theoretiker in dieser Tradition standen. Die Theorie der liberalen Demokratie hat sich letztlich selbst jegliche kritische Funktion in Bezug auf die Resultate abgesprochen. Statt dessen ist sie gezwungen, jedes Ergebnis zu ratifizieren, ohne Rücksicht darauf, wie offensichtlich es irreführend oder sogar tragisch sein mag, solange es das Erzeugnis einer akzeptierten autoritativen Bündels von Verfahren und Institutionen ist. Eine neue theoretische Richtung wird sicherlich gegen alle Elemente ankämpfen müssen, die größtenteils im Rawlsschen Ansatz und den Schriften der meisten seiner liberaldemokratischen Mitläufer fehlen: mit Macht, Gewalt, Domination, Ideologie, Entschlüssen, Deutungen, politischem Ausdruck, Revolution, Geschichte, Ökonomie, Biopolitik. Was wir dringend brauchen, sind neue Modelle sozialer und politischer Philosophie!

William L. McBride

La fin de la démocratie libérale telle que nous l'avons connue?

Les failles dans la théorie de la démocratie libérale ont été toujours localisées dans au moins deux sphères importantes: celle de la procédure et celle des résultats. En ce qui concerne la première, le problème réside dans le fait que l'on tâche que »la volonté du peuple« – ou du moins celle du peuple pertinent, des électeurs éligibles – s'exprime à travers des mécanismes signifiants et pratiques. Suivant le consensus partagé jusqu'à récemment par la plupart des théoriciens orthodoxes de la démocratie libérale, les élections à des corps représentatifs et les votes ultérieurs des gagnants de ces élections constituent de tels mécanismes. Or, on constate à tout bout de champ que différentes instances des pouvoirs élus agissent à l'encontre de l'opinion des groupements de personnes qui les ont élus. La théorie de la démocratie libérale dit que, tant que l'on respecte les procédures appropriées permettant l'expression majoritaire (ou, à certaines instances, seulement plurielle) de la volonté du peuple quant à ceux qui le représenteront, les représentants sont légitimés à voter contre la volonté apparente du peuple. Or, c'est une pure contradiction pratique. En ce qui concerne la question des résultats, la théorie récente de la démocratie libérale s'est creusé là une fosse encore plus profonde en abandonnant le concept de bien commun, auquel souscrivaient du moins quelques-uns des théoriciens plus traditionnels. La théorie de la démocratie libérale a finalement renoncé à toute fonction critique à l'égard des résultats. Par contre, elle est obligée de ratifier tout résultat, quelque déplorable ou même tragique qu'il puisse être, tant qu'il soit le produit de l'ensemble habilité des procédures et des institutions admises. Or, la nouvelle orientation théorique devra s'attaquer à tous les éléments qui sont absents dans l'approche rawlsienne et dans les écrits de la plupart des disciples libéraux de Rawls: pouvoir, violence, domination, idéologie, décision, interprétation, expression politique, révolution, histoire, économie, biopolitique. On a désespérément besoin de nouveaux modèles pour la philosophie sociale et politique!