

Broading the European political space on present challenges

Maurizio Serio, Università degli Studi Guglielmo Marconi, Rome, Italy

The relation after the function

This reflection aims to bring some elements of that theoretical and empirical approach called “Relational Sociology” or “Relational Theory of Society” into a proper political perspective, even at the risk of providing a prescriptive assessment of the current European situation.

Such a relational approach (Donati, 1991) refers to a methodological pluralism where “the decisive step [...] is that goes over the social primacy of policy. This step consists of starting to think not to a unique social order, rather to different and irreducible orders limiting one another” (Censis, 2000). It looks at the perspective of European unity within the dialectical poles of monist or polyarchical forms of the distribution of power according to the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity.

These elements are peculiar to political authority, and make it capable of a kind global governance that is very far from any European Super-State perspective. In fact, to bring back a State form orientation could reveal a historical nonsense, just when the State itself enjoys a low rate of popular legitimacy, since a general request of new forms of organization has arisen from many territories: in terms of *governance* (Calise, 2000; Held, McGrew, 2007), liquid government (Messina, 2012), “glocalism” (Holton, 2005; Bauman, 1998). Moreover, sovereignty, as the distinctive and fundamental feature of the State, has been deconstructed and reinterpreted according to standard quite far from a state dimension. Indeed, as noted by CENSIS Research Center, “you can say that now, more than the evaporation of state sovereignty, is the oldest liquefaction of the sovereignty of the citizen to cause widespread grumblings” (CENSIS, 2012).

Instead, we know how Europe’s building up has progressed by adopting a functionalist methodology, following the idea that inter-state cooperation over single policy-areas would have favored a greater union. Functionalism had the great historical credit to start the rebuilding of the political system of the Old Continent around concrete issues and not around vague principles. Since the Westphalian-Realpolitik ended into bloody trenches of the two world

wars, that was an enormous risk; it could be simpler to appeal to a vague humanitarianism able to tie with necessity those Countries, wasted by wars and one another distrustful. At most, there could be a changeable balance with a pattern of mutual alliances drawn up only on bilateral bases.

This approach has, since then, turned into a neo-functionalism in the grip of the lobbies. Today, it seems not to be enough, both because its fundamental premise (the unity and homogeneity of the markets as a way to unify the peoples) is undermined, and on account of the re-surfaced request of a political unity, even in the form of a “Europe of nations, or peoples”, which had once seemed to have been defeated by the very historical evolution of the EU.

European Founding Fathers, Adenauer, Schuman, De Gasperi, Monnet, implemented a great functionalist policy to cement the cooperative ability of a group of countries around the same resources, the control of which for centuries had been the source of many conflicts. That functionalism responded with a compromise (rewarding each country, but not maximizing at the expense of the others) to the “prisoner’s dilemma of the 20th century”, where the prisoners were national spirits, humiliated by totalitarianism and therefore potentially vindictive. In addition, it was a right application of “trial-and-error” form of liberalism, since it managed to survive the sinking of the European Defense Community (1954), a project, however, that was part of the plan to create joint management of the typical functions of national state. In fact, the European integration “aimed to create further limitations to the idea of the democratic nation-state, due to the presence of non-elective institutions” (Müller, 2011), thus placing itself in a state of perennially searching for a principle of justification to legitimize it in the eyes of the people.

Actually, the building-up of Europe began to creak when the 2004 enlargement towards recent democratic countries (as happened before with Spain, Portugal and Greece) was pursued by the diffusion of standards and rules, rather than *values*, and of techniques, rather than *ideals*, in this way contributing to Brussels’ claims of despotic sovereignty. In the same way, the clumsy project – which later shipwrecked in 2009 – of a European Constitution superimposed upon the historical, religious and political cultures of the Continent, finally revealed the futility of such an inauthentic interpretation of functionalism. It caused populist and xenophobic oppositions and it was further exacerbated by the Crisis that is still heavily affecting us today.

In front of such a historical *impasse*, we can adopt a stratified approach to put aside the claims of supremacy nurtured by Politics. As Luigi Sturzo suggested, politics must be content to be counted as sphere of production of a particular share of the common good (public order and peace), among many other spheres that are indifferent to politics or not subordinated to it. This does not mean to “limit” Politics – something attempted several times in the Modern Age – but rather implies that its meanings and functions should be redefined.

Europe can then change direction to avoid that trap of “Occidentalism” already described by Spengler both as a theory and as praxis of decadence. This does not mean to embrace a sort of “second-hand globalism” in the way many do when looked uncritically to the great Eastern traditions, as the Chinese and Indian. Today, there is no territory like Europe where the globalization shows with more patency its whole semantic extension, along the two specular meaning of crisis and/or *opportunity*. After having spent many years in the persuasion that opportunity was the real face of global processes, we bitterly awakened in a situation where the crisis seems normal. In other words, it seems as the same crisis would be a recurring phase of human history where the strongest or the smartest have necessarily to prevail.

This fake and bizarre Machiavellian stereotype prevent us from conceiving the shades of human action, its unintentional consequences and its natural fallibility. Maybe for a moment we can forget those two opposite meanings of globalization, focusing instead on a realistic attitude that consider

the global processes in their mere complexity. Actually, complexity is the reality of globalization; still, *complexity* pushes us to act, insisting on our rational and relational anthropological structure; and complexity alone can and need to be governed, since it has to be oriented and guided to reach common good. The often painful experience of these years is showing that there are no fixes to govern the crisis; the experience of “the world of yesterday” instead showed us how illusory is to think to govern opportunities, because it is impossible to control the human instinct for abusing power – in finance as in politics, all the way. Therefore, both crisis and opportunity are *reductionisms* that do not let us face a global and complex world. A world where we all are “without maps”, quoting the title of a smart book by a former vice-secretary of NATO Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo. Nor policy makers, nor private-sector operators have this kind of help and orientation. Nevertheless, they hopefully manage to increase the civil social capital. Moreover, it feeds on the quality of relationships among different spheres of social existence where everyone of us spends his/her life.

Adopting the relational paradigm, this leads to promote a fundamentally cooperative structure of human relationships. Only open societies, or polyarchies, are able to promote this paradigm: nor imperialisms, nor dictatorships, nor those narrow-minded claims of self-sufficiency that even today go with the pooped debates about European future. Along this way, it is possible to rediscover, within European political thought itself, some cultural trends that dissent from that technocratic uniformity of which Brussels is the last agonizing manifestation. However, we need to rediscover it not in the name of mere values or interests, but rather in the name of an adherence to reality, which also means an adherence to the deeper truth of things. A renewed European realism, thus, based on empirical evidence of historical relations and political contingencies, because, as Robert Schuman said in his Declaration of 9th May 1950: “Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a *de facto* solidarity”.

To do this, we must reject that Hobbesian interpretation seeing a political link as a mere pact of submission to the State from citizens. In fact, despite all the formal statements in the name of subsidiarity contained in EU documents, the Crisis has shown the absolute self-referentiality of European politics, which imposes solutions, even drastically, regardless of popular consensus.

Now, in the democratic age, the face of the consensus is found in the principle of representation, especially in its indirect version. The matter turns up on two levels:

1. making the representation subsidiary for all intents and purposes, seeing that decision-making becomes no more the outcome of a dark plan, often arbitrated by lobbies, but rests on popular sovereignty
2. enabling that subsidiary representation to produce “relational goods”: those goods that “consist of social relations among people (or citizens) and that require an attitude of sharing from those who generate and enjoy them” (Donati, 2011). In this way, the relation is no more a “*primum immobile*” but it can regenerate itself over and over, until it becomes the very form of politics

Thus, on political matter the solution may be an institutional reform that would give meaning and substance to the invocation of a European political union. Such a reform, interpreted in a subsidiary, polyarchal and relational key, will aim to reduce the “democratic deficit” that has been a part of the European project since its inception. Therefore, one might expect a redistribution of powers between the Commission and the European Parliament, dividing the latter into two popularly-elected chambers: one composed of the political representatives of every member State, the other

with a technical, non-political, though not exclusive competence on economic and social matters. It could be expressive of transnational interest groups, enrolled in a special register. We might add that this house should strengthen (and ultimately replace) the skills and profile of the Economic and Social Council, which is currently only an advisory body. As far as the selection of representatives, this house could be elected in a single European electoral constituency, provided that it includes a fixed number (3?) of representatives from each State-member. At the same time, the “political” chamber should continue to be elected on a national-based constituency.

According to a relational perspective, the implications deriving from this reform should concern both the process of popular consultation and the accountability of the European political class, providing a media-platform to connect constantly the members of both houses with their voters, during both the electoral campaign and their mandate. All this can be pursued by resorting to open-source tools, for monitoring parliamentary activity, which grant immediate feedback to the policies implemented. These tools of participatory democracy can include wider and wider layers of citizens in political activity, distancing them from being enmeshed by any populist movement, and improving their loyalty towards an international perspective more than to a narrow-minded vision on mere domestic issues. Thus, looking beyond the usual reverence for the mantra of technological innovation, and any futuristic rhetoric, the same massive spread of peer-to-peer instruments of web-democracy (i.e. social networks, forums or applications for the aggregation and the study of open data) should be considered in the light of the danger of the setting of a “dictatorship of the active” that would simply replace the (supposed) corrupt and unqualified élite with another élite: namely, some aggressive, organized and diligent minorities imposing themselves with no less coercion on the majority of citizens. As the European political space does not seem sufficiently impenetrable when facing with a probable escalation of this kind, such a shift could start a trend of gradual marginalization of the moderates from the political debate (Hindman, 2008). This could occur in a manner analogous to what happened at the hand of some *avant-garde* political groups who inspired the action of international and non-governmental organizations. These new populist élites are not so different from lobbies currently working at the margins of the European Parliament, which are often fostered by radical public opinion. We have no more time: the constituency is required to be gradually diverted from the populist sirens and from their allure of transgression against the canons of political orthodoxy: rather, people have to be passionate about authentic democratic game. Democracy is centered on the inexhaustible capacity for innovation which exists in the nature of these very same institutions (Acemoglu, Robinson, 2012), inasmuch as they embody the highest expression of popular sovereignty. Coherently with the call addressed by Pope Francis “to initiate processes rather than occupy spaces”, today the challenge of politics has to be played on the grounds of inclusion, whether you consider democracy in terms of liberty, or you consider it in terms of equality.

Beyond a welfare perspective

Regarding this end, the benchmark is the controversial affair of the Welfare State, with its results in terms of material wealth and psychological dependence. These last two dimensions often turned the Welfare from a factor of progress to an obstacle towards that social mobility it stated to promote. The First World War and the spread of the Great Depression abroad saw States taking on unprecedented prerogatives and expanding in sectors of social and economic life once managed only by privates. The measures of planning, rationing, mobilization

and reconstruction taken at that time, created new links between governments and groups of producers, giving to the latter broader legislative powers, with a decisive impact on subsequent paradigms of public policy.

According to Charles Maier, the corporatist organization increased apace with the increased government functions. “Every centralization of an allocative task prompts a new search for consultation and co-decision making” with the actors involved. And the “crisis involved in wartime provided just the clearest and most dramatic example in delegations from industry and labor”. Maier concludes that the new corporatism has its roots in the “recasting bourgeois Europe” which took place between the two World Wars (Maier, 1981).

Philippe Schmitter noticed that John Maynard Keynes was “the first major theorist to perceive certain emergent imperatives of capitalism and to link them explicitly with corporatism” (Schmitter, 1974). In his essay *The End of Laissez-Faire* (1926), Keynes challenged the economic and anthropological assumptions of the classical theory, according to which the enlightened self-interest always operates, albeit unintentionally, for the public interest (the Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” by Adam Smith). One year before, Keynes stated that “in the future, the Government will have to take on many duties which it has avoided in the past”. As Schmitter commented, the objective of this imperative policy expansion was to exercise “directive intelligence through some appropriate organ of action over the many intricacies of private business, yet (...) leave private initiative and enterprise unhindered”. In turn, all his critics highlighted, especially looking at the results achieved in the application of these theories, the contradiction expressed in these words. But Keynes continued: “I believe that in many cases the ideal size for the unit of control and organization lies somewhere between the individual and the modern state. I suggest, therefore, that progress lies in the growth and recognition of semi-autonomous bodies within the state – bodies whose criterion of action within their own field is solely the public good as they understand it, and from whose deliberations motives of private advantage are excluded, though some place it may still be necessary to leave, until the ambit of men’s altruism grows wider, to the separate advantage of particular groups, classes, or faculties – bodies which in their ordinary course of affairs are mainly autonomous within their prescribed limitations, but are subject in the last resort to the sovereignty of democracy expressed through parliament. I propose a return, it may be said, towards medieval conceptions of separate autonomies” (Keynes, 1926; Schmitter, 1974).

Well, here lies to me the paradox of the modern State: the modern, monist State was born just to contrast that social fragmentation and (polyarchical) dispersion of power typical of Middle Age and *ancien régime*. The State was conceived to reduce the diversity to the unity under the supreme sphere of a positive law. It had to be implemented by the State *longa manus*, the Bureaucracy, in order to build a constricted space for individual and social liberties, and make them controlled and submitted to the State (liberty *in* the State).

On the other hand, the progressive development of liberalism threatened state sovereignty, since it is a doctrine of liberty coming just from the State. It reacted organizing common interests and limiting the acknowledgement of their action and existence. This was a clear attempt to rule the natural complexity of society, re-imposing a shaky order on the liberties’ emerging vitality (Galli, 2001; Diotallevi, 2010).

In other words, the State realized that it needed professional and specialized skills to *rule the complexity*. They could be extracted only from some monopolies of representation organized into a hierarchy under the State control. Besides, the governments benefited from a too fragile

legitimacy to impose their own policy directions. Then, they sought to include in the decision-making the big organizations of interests. In order to pursue this aim, the State even consented to transfer or divide with those groups a great part of its own decision authority. In this sense, some scholars equated the new corporatism to consultation (or “concertazione”) in the matter of an economic policy. In fact, some corporations were always used to be consulted by government before the implementation of political measures.

To sum: in new corporatist countries, the State is the driving and aggregative force of interests – not the *civil society* (as pluralist or polyarchical orthodoxy would like) (Schmitter, 1981). Here, from the Sixties onward, some groups of interests (trade unions and industrial associations) handed the upper hand on the others, replacing even political parties in their roles and functions. In the same way, those groups got also a decisive influence on social and economic policies, to such an extent to be considered the principal or exclusive beneficiaries of such policies. In fact those groups don't limit themselves to represent the interests of their members, rather they generate and impose them on the whole society; nor they limit themselves to give their demands in the political arena, but they take part to it in order to guide the decision-making on their paths.

We may find fixed on this level the reasons of a widespread hostility towards these new corporatist arrangements. They come undoubtedly from those vital social forces which cannot tolerate further narrowing in the sphere of influence of their political representation. In my opinion too, the social model resulting from new corporatism is the real accused of the current and systemic crisis of our Continent. Yet, there is at least another European tradition from which we can glean useful suggestions in order to escape from these doldrums: the economic ordo-liberalism theory and the social market economy, which according to many observers can be considered as the foundation of the European Community (De Benedetto, 2000).

The ordo-liberal way

To be clear on the origins and specific identity of social market economy (SME) we may go back to those scholars (lawyers, economists and social scientists) who, in Nazi-Germany, gathered under the leadership of W. Eucken (Felice, 2008; Eucken, 1951). This group took the name of Friburg School and the philosophy inspiring it was called “Ordo-liberalism”, from the title of the review “Ordo”, founded by the same Eucken in 1940 (Forte, Felice, 2010). The problem, at the same time historical and philosophical, they had to face, is the following: is it today a government of economy really required? And in which shapes to be respectful of individual freedom, unavoidable basis of Christianity and liberalism?

The first answer is positive, in conflict with the postulates of a libertarian credo *à la* Rothbard, and the different idealizations of a “minimal State”, put forward by the most open-minded theoreticians of neoliberalism. The distance from whom, must be measured not only on the basis of the inclusion of the State among the economic actors, but above all, on the clear assumption of its role as arbiter, an impartial “third one”. More than the control of the market, the ordo-liberals wish for a State control over the right working of market rule, against monopolies and oligopolies which would deny any individual freedom, among which, that one relating to economic enterprise.

For this reason, to understand the ordo-liberal perspective, a key-category proves to be that of a “conformable intervention” within the space of action for economic policies. As well

explained by Felice, connecting the positions of one of the great theorists of the School, Wilhelm Röpke, we can define “conformable” those interventions of the State which do not suppress the “mechanics of prices” and “self-government” of the market, but, on the contrary, they insert in it, as new data to be assimilated by the market itself. “Unconformable” will be instead those interventions destroying the mechanics of prices, and substituting it with an economic programmatic order, that is collective or socialist.

In this way, examples of conformable interventions are monetary devaluation and policy of protective duties, while examples of unconformable interventions are the imposition of price control on rents, the control of exchange rate, and the implementation of quota system on import. The last ones would destroy the mechanism ruling the formation of the prices. However, the conformity of an intervention is not yet enough to make it recommendable, because a great space must always be given to the creativity of the executives and of national parliaments. Only in this way, measuring wisely these instruments and the contingent situations, will be found not the best possible solutions, in the economic field, but, at least, the most respectful of the fragile and fascinating mechanism of the “rules of freedom”.

The whole discourse is extremely contemporary to us, since, considering the lasting state of crisis of European building, it is sometimes sustained the requirement or less of a government of economy, and the gradualness of such an intervention. Between old-fashioned Keynesisms (Piketty) and apparent liberalism (Macron), the main point can be only the respect, again, of individual freedom, that great issue joining Christian anthropology and liberal method, at the basis of the project of European Founding Fathers (De Gasperi, Adenauer, Schumann). Besides, a certain clarity from many sides is required on what can be the most adequate perspective, so that in the future this European long-term dream can keep itself true. Among the most authoritative answers, there are those giving a renewed understanding of social market economy, as an open inclusive system of the effective reality inside the vision of EU governance.

It is true, however, that the same social market economy has been for long a viscous category of social and economic sciences, owing to its current sense in public debate. Actually, this perspective, compressed between incoherent interpretations of its epistemological statute and open contrasts, motivated on the mere ideological side, is still in search of political interpreters inspired by the great theorists. The goal to reach is the translation of an economic doctrine into a government one, safeguarding its deep hardcore as a liberal theory variant, founded on the constitutional rules and the proper role of arbiter the State institutions have to exercise.

This objective can be reached only opposing strongly and fiercely any effort to legitimize neo-corporate positions (Forte, Felice, 2012) that consider State as a saviour or the natural end of every public activity. The pretext of it would be that free-market institutions cannot govern social conflicts, not less than political tensions, coming from the serious crises shaking global finance and real economy. Obviously, all these scholars – from Eucken to Bohm, from Müller Armack to Lutz – were well aware of the need to safeguard the consumer/saver citizen against the omnivorous claims of welfarist bureaucracy. Naturally they showed their worries with different sensitivities, perfectly analyzed nowadays by Viktor J. Vanberg, a leader of the historiographic “*nouvelle vague*” on the matter. It has been a hard battle, led unexpectedly on the German side, just when the mainstream Anglo-American opinion leaders justified the return of the State in economy, forgetting the real, liberal lesson of Scottish Enlightenment.

Anyway, the sore point, yesterday as to-day, is given by the weight of rent not only inside the

economic theory, but also inside the same culture and political praxis of European continent: that is, inside the “material constitution” of young and fragile – perhaps at the moment exhausted and uncertain – European democracies. Ordo-liberals, in turn, set the institution of rent as the dialectic counterpart of economic competition. (The latter is seen, of course, in the light of the Christian principle of subsidiarity, as a sane competition, and as a free effort of cooperation among all the spheres of human action). From the rent in fact take their origin monopolies, that is, that centralist and excluding kind of power-management which restraints individual freedom still before the market mechanisms (Forte, Felice, 2012).

Now, as regards individual freedom, it is strange to observe that is a scholar like Walter Eucken, son of Rudolf (the idealist Jena philosopher and Nobel Prize – then, not the last traditionalist sexton!) to connect explicitly, starting from the Modern Age, the movement of progressive concentration in the State of any competence in deciding on the personal life of its citizens/subjects, to the contemporary spreading of a nihilistic philosophy among European *élites* and people. All this, up to the overturning *de facto* of Kant’s categorical imperative, according to which “the apparatus becomes the purpose, human being the instrument” (Forte, Felice, 2012).

Secondly, just about market mechanisms, it is right to notice how for ordo-liberals is not in question the appreciation of the *laissez-faire* doctrine, lost in the smoky contradictions of libertarianism, till to become with Rothbard justifiable even of cartel agreements. This, in the name of an anthropological tare inspired to optimism of the will, more than to pessimism of the intellect – which signed, instead, the quiet fallibilism of Hayek and Buchanan (Forte, Felice, 2012).

In conclusion, ordo-liberalism has inspired the harmonic reconstruction after the Second World War, winning almost insuperable challenges. In the same way today, against threats not less full of anguish and pervasive, this ordo-liberal perspective can accompany the action of European governments, suggesting the formation of a polyarchic space where the actors of the market and civil society, collectively and individually, can coexist counting on the pro-active impartiality of political (state and supranational) institutions. Development cannot derive from authoritative solutions coming from above, but from a correct and systematic realization of the principle of subsidiarity, both in vertical and horizontal sense. The purpose will be then to discover the levers of growth which, once activated, can generate a social European capital, able to regenerate itself in every historical conjuncture, as an endless resource of planning and cohesion between peoples and institutions.

Conclusion

In short, the socio-economic constitution of Europe outlines a model of social market economy. According to that, public authorities have to promote a “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”, and they have to implement a set of interventions conformable to the subsidiarity principle.

Even here, if we would adopt a subsidiarity and relational view, we could find both theoretical and empirical evidence of our starting point. It stands to reason that the supply of essential services for individual subsistence could not be limited to a redistribution of economic resources; rather, it has to turn into a growth of that quality of life we quoted at the beginning of this work.

In other words, as Robert Kennedy suggested some decades ago, Gross National product (GNP) is not enough. Only relations could keep societies united and cohesive through those agencies devoted to creating and promoting relational goods, as *in primis* the families, the associations of families, the

third sector, even those companies engaged in paths of corporate responsibility. In this sense, and only in this sense, “private is public”, as the revolutionary slogan of ‘68 stated. And Europe can be considered a relational good if it becomes the multiplier of our deeper ambitions and truer bonds, as citizens and as nations.

Notes

(1) Don’t mix this statement with that naive cosmopolitanism that has been stigmatized also by Lind 2011

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