Book Reviews

Just Democracy: The Rawls-Machiavelli Programme is a collection of essays by the Belgian philosopher Philippe Van Parijs, dedicated to examining the limits of compatibility between justice and democracy.

The main normative claim of the book is that, if conflicts between democracy and justice arise, justice should prevail, whereas democracy should be adjusted so as to best serve its goals. In order to show why justice and democracy cannot go together all the way, Van Parijs works with a (Rawlsian) liberal, as well as solidaristic, conception of social justice as "liberty-constrained maximin" (33), and a deliberately "thin" (i.e. procedural) definition of democracy – a "combination of majority rule, universal suffrage and free voting" (7).

If justice should trump democracy, the value of the latter is conceived of as instrumental, which explains why efforts should be directed not at maximizing democracy, but at shaping institutions through democratic procedures in order to maximize justice. The Rawlsian element of the "programme" consists, thus, in a comprehensive theory of justice which advocates improving (in the maximin sense) the situation of the worst off, and ensuring equal respect for fundamental liberties. If Rawls provides the goal (and, hence, the legitimacy of the programme), Machiavelli provides the means, or rather a general method for achieving it. Therefore, the Machiavellian element refers to a form of "institutional engineering" that entails negotiations and imposing limits within a democratic procedure, so that realistically defined self-interested agents ("People need to be taken as they are, or can feasibly made to be." [56]) could be made to work towards more social justice and accept the potential costs of less democracy.

The conjunction of these two views on political philosophy results in a "ruthless consequentialism" (39), which, as the author argues, should not be exempted from a careful screening of its "counterproductive effects." (60)

Throughout the ten chapters of the book, Van Parijs expands on his main argument, providing the reader with insightful comments, original proposals and fresh examples, which should make one wary of pleading for any "pre-established harmony" (8) between justice and democracy. It is an ambitious intellectual achievement, which takes the discussion along various dimensions (national, supra-national, inter-generational justice, international migrations, linguistic justice). These mirror both the author's multitude of research interests, and his particular commitment to political philosophy as a "crucial part of the urgent task of thinking what needs to be done to make our societies and our world less unjust than they are, or even simply to avert disaster," thus very far from an idle game of academics (24).

The first three chapters elaborate on the reasons for which democracy should be seen as lacking intrinsic value. They add conceptual clarifications – such as the contrast between Van Parijs's view of "real freedom" and Pettit's "contestatory democracy" – and focus on the pressure that just aims (e.g. opening the borders to ensure fair opportunities for poorer migrant workers) put on existing institutions.

One of the most interesting and convincing discussions is presented in chapter

four, which takes up the challenge at inter-generational level and conducts a systematic analysis of the requirements and difficulties of justice between age cohorts.

The argument starts from the statistically-empirically borne out assumption that current democratic electoral systems may be conducive to some injustice between younger and elderly citizens. Given that they are procedurally designed to voice the preferences of electors, which "power-hungry parties are out to satisfy" (35), and there is a rising trend in the age of the median voters, electoral systems tend to give more weight to the (short-term) interests and preferences of the elderly. As it is often the case, these diverge from those of the younger citizens; moreover, when related to distributive patterns, this divergence generates additional normative tension.

In what follows, Van Parijs explores various avenues towards reconciling what is required by justice and what is allowed by democracy. In so doing, he reviews a number of options, and carefully unpacks their implications within the scope of the Rawls-Machiavelli programme. The central proposal consists in giving parents proxy votes for their children. By shifting the focus of voting rights to their relationship with parenthood, this alternative provides an implicit account of the motivation problem and relates to an intuitive interest-protecting conception of intergenerational obligations. Its aim should be understood as "shifting electoral weight in favour of those whose interests are at risk of being insufficiently taken into consideration" (57). However, putting the programme to test reveals new sets of challenges for intergenerational justice, such as: the difficulty of maintaining the fairness effect obtained for one generation for the benefit of more remote ones or the connection between voting schemes, procreation incentives, and the welfare of future generations.

The ensuing chapters are dedicated to the electoral reform in Belgium and the institutional design of the European Union. Here again, Van Parijs's commitment to a solidaristic view on justice and his own concern for linguistic justice are at the forefront of the discussions.

In the Belgian case, two arguments are worth noting. The first refers to the transition from a "power-sharing" to a "border-crossing" system in a political community split up along ethnic and linguistic lines. Such a transition aims to redesign the mechanism of representation, and "reshape political competition and rhetoric, so that these will consist again in confrontation, not between the interests of mono-ethnic blocs, but between alternative versions of the common good." (95) The second takes the issue one step further (a "Copernican revolution"), and advocates a combination between a pluri-national democracy and a trans-national welfare state, which would allow Belgium a better representation of its linguistic communities, as well as a broader electoral accountability of politicians.

In the second case, reconciling the demands of democracy and justice in the European Union starts from balancing efficiency-sensitive considerations with those of "sustainability, diversity and solidarity." (69) But clarifying what each of the latter could be reasonably taken to mean beyond national borders generates significant difficulties, which Van Parijs examines at length. Applying a conception of solidaristic justice at supranational level implies, in fact, reconstructing a form of solidarity in the context of the single European market, a non-homogeneous population, and a rising trend of labour migration to the more affluent member states. Moreover, a concern for solidarity that is translated into redistributive policies would presuppose a broader notion of representation, which "should be structured along ideological or social rather than eth-

nic or territorial borders" (74), and, equally, a broader notion of accountability (*demoscracy*), i.e. accountability "to the people of Europe as a whole."

The EU cases, as well as the discussion on intergenerational justice in chapter 4 clearly illustrate the stakes of the philosophical exercise that Philippe Van Parijs proposes to his readers. This is, indeed, a rigorous research doubled by a permanent quest for practical and non-rigid solutions adequate for the near future, and put to test by means of institutional and policy improvement.

The main merit of this approach is, perhaps, the fact that it is intended to enrich the original Rawlsian 'programme,' as Van Parijs is wary of taking the "nation state as the self-evident frame of reference" (1). This is of major interest in a context where many problems of political philosophy are now collective action problems, with complex causality and intricate interdependence between nations and generations. Climate change and governance of natural resources are examples of such problems, where one nation's policy can have (disastrous) consequences on others (such as third-world countries), or where one generation's opting out of the chain of obligations could have an irreversible negative impact on the next one.

However, these are not the only dilemmas that collective action cases bring about, and it would perhaps be interesting to supplement Van Parijs's insightful discussion with an account of group agency and moral responsibility. In the end, relaxing our assumptions about democracy does not dismiss the question of how to work from a bundle of diverse, conflicting interests, some circumscribed by individual rights, to coherent policies destined to maximizing the prospects of the worst off (not limited to a particular nation or generation), in the name of justice and solidarity.

Having taken up the challenge of combining Rawls and Machiavelli and extending their original programmes, *Just Democracy* provides a complex account of the conceptual relationship between global social justice and national/supra-national democracy. Throughout the book, the reader can locate many sensitive spots on the justice-democracy map, as well as weigh the required means of action suggested by the author. In the end, these illustrate that democracy should not be taken for granted, and that, in its shadow, there is enough room for injustice.

Reviewed by Ileana Dascălu
University of Bucharest
ileana.dascalu83@gmail.com