ON "PARLER VRAI"

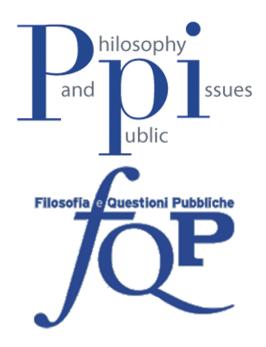## REFLECTION OVER THE POLITICAL LANGUAGES OF THE (DIS)TRUST IN *LE BON GOUVERNEMENT* BY PIERRE ROSANVALLON

BY

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> There will be good governance
> only when philosophers become kings
> or the kings become philosophers
> [Plato]

Having devoted a large part of his own research to the history of democracy, and in particular focusing on the French political model, Pierre Rosanvallon developed, among the basic ideas of his thought, the concept for which between citizens and political class there was an increasingly unbearable distance, thus producing the loss of trust that ruled people could pin on leaders, and creating a wide space of "active distrust". Hence, first of all, the idea of establishing a "counter-democracy", founded on new ideals on which the daily work of "counter-democracy" citizens should be based: "monitoring", "prevention" and "judging". (As evidenced from one of his own reference texts, *Counterdemocracy*[1], dated 2006, in which the idea of current democracies citizens abandoning the streets in order to take refuge in the sphere of private life, for example, is reconsidered, etc.). In addition to that, it is necessary to reflect on

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[1] P. Rosanvallon, *La contre-démocratie. La politique à l'âge de la défiance* (Paris: Seuil, 2006).

the languages of politics: this theoretical framework, in fact, imposes some serious thinking about political rhetoric and its own evolution within the troubled detours of democracy, in the history of Western thought.

It emerges, then, how necessary, on a linguistic and communicative level, it might be to return to meditate on the new languages and rhetoric of Contemporary Politics, that need to be radically reformulated, facing the inedited scenarios in which new democracies are evolving (or involving) and the new mechanisms linked to their legitimacy and legitimating. As a matter of fact, democratic life is nowadays assuming a new face and it is re-building itself through new linguistics registers.

The disaffection of citizens towards the traditional democratic Institutions contributes to making these more and more breakable and to creating new "counter-democracy" spaces, which are symptoms of the profound crisis of traditional politics, of its own languages and especially of the democratic form of Government. People tend to set themselves up as judges and overseers of the Institutions, leading to a sort of "impolitic democracy", where the "supervisor citizen" seeks to replace the "elector citizen", threatening to restrain as much as possible the activity of the rulers. This gap, which is more and more evident between rulers and ruled, paves the way to various forms of populism, sometimes destructive, always shared by protest and feelings of distrust, along with fear and hatred, often encouraged by new languages, of which new leaders of populist movements cleverly become masters[2].

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[2] As Pierre Rosanvallon asserted: "A democracy certainly cannot continue to progress if, among the individuals, the sense of belonging to a common and shared society lacks. Populism might worm its way into the social fracture that

If the mechanism of power ceases to be founded on the principle of consensus (traditionally built on elections), given that democracy of elections must be accompanied by democracy of government action, it goes without saying that the new model of active citizenry created by Rosanvallon is not based only (nor mainly) on the electoral principle, but on the activity of control that citizens are supposed to be able to exert. Hence, the need for a new rhetoric, no longer just founded on the ability of persuading, aimed to build the consensus-machine, but on the idea of "true speech", towards which the conclusive reflections of one of the latest works of Pierre Rosanvallon, titled *Good Government*[3] tends.

This book opens with very strong words:

> Our systems can be said democratic but we are not governed democratically. This is the big hiatus that makes people disenchanted and confused. Precision. Our systems are said to be democratic, that is to say that power comes from voting as a conclusion to an open competition, and that we live in rule of law which recognizes and protects individuals' rights and freedom. This model of democracy may be far from achieved. Represented often feel abandoned by their representatives, and the people, when votes are closed, feels much less sovereign. However, this reality

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is to say the pathology of the democracy-regime that takes advantage from the deconstruction of the democracy-society. In the face of the sense of belonging crisis, populism responds with exaltation of a sense of fictitious community, based on a nationalist ideology made of exclusion, xenophobia and illusory homogeneity. In order to reply to populism, it is therefore necessary to promote a society where the word equality may be again meaningful." (Pierre Rosanvallon, "The myth of meritocracy can destroy society.", interview released to Fabio Gambaro, *Repubblica*, November 8th 2011, my translation).

[3] Cf. Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le bon gouvernement* (Paris: Seuil, 2015).

must not hide the other fact, still not completely identified in its specificity: the fact that a bad government is deeply consuming our societies[4].

In the following pages we will be questioning ourselves on the new languages of politics, that are imposing themselves in new forms of counter-democracy: to do so, we are going to try to reconstruct the genesis of the notion of "parler vrai" (elaborated in *Good Government*) initially examining some previous texts of Rosanvallon, such as *The Nowhere to Be Found People* (1998) and *Counterdemocracy* (2006).

II

Genesis of Rosanvallonian reflections on (dis)trust democracy languages

i. *On the malaise of the "imperfect democracy" and on the "voice of the people" (in The Nowhere to Be Found People, 1998)*

The theme of the crisis of democracy has accompanied the reflections of Rosanvallon since his first publications, which date back to the 1970s. One of the first texts in which this theme was tackled, with particular reference to the problem of representation, is *The Nowhere to Be Found People*, dated 1998, from which we can gain important reflections on the theme of the languages of democracy, whence a guideline starts, leading to the argumentations of *Good Government* dedicated to the theme of the language of politics, rhetoric and of the "true speech".

In this quest, dated 1998, Rosanvallon diffusely examined the "malaise" of democracy, showing how "the main difficulty lies in

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[4] Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le bon gouvernement*, 9.

the distance between the political principle – the affirmation of the supremacy of the general will – and sociological reality":

> There is, thus, a contradiction between democracy political principle and sociological principle. The political principle consecrates the power of a collective subject whose sociological principle tends to reduce consistency and visibility[5].

For these and other reasons, Rosanvallon could, therefore, affirm that

> Democracy has been for two centuries the point of reference for our political heritage. Yet, it continues to be unfinished[6].

The incompleteness of democracy goes together with that malaise, to be intended both as a pathology of the democratic system (malaise in democracy) both as the discontent of people who feel less and less represented by the Institutions, in which places increasingly losing faith (malaise of democracy).

This is connected to many aspects, one of which, certainly not irrelevant, concerns a problem of language and communication of politics. Par. 3 of the first chapter is, in fact, entitled: "The body of the people, the people's voice". If the idea of people (as shown in the previous pages) has a related "constitutive abstraction" (hence the central notion of the text: "The Nowhere to Be Found People", precisely), the question of Rosanvallon sounds like this:

> How to give a voice and a face when the forge of the revolutionary events has finished producing its effects and forging a clear unit?[7].

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[5] Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le Peuple introuvable. Histoire de la représentation démocratique en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015), "Introduction".
[6] *Ibid.*,

In this text by Rosanvallon, the matter of the language of politics is evoked and inflected in relation to the concept of "vox populi": about that, he recalls authors such as Michelet e Proudhon. By Michelet, in particular, he reports expressions like: "The world has enough rhetoricians and empty abstractions"[8], or "What could I give to this big dumb people! What I had, a voice..."[9]. From this, the idea of distance between people and politicians follows: if the latter use rhetoric in order to obtain consensus, on the other hand, the people's voice remains unheard: hence, the need of the intellectual, in general, (and of the historian in particular[10]) to give back to the people a voice and a language through which to communicate with the Institutions, in order to assert their own instances. Aim of Rosanvallon, especially in *Good Government*, which we are going to analyse in more depth, is to rethink a new language of politics: through a normative approach, he prefigured the need of a "true speech", founded on principles such as honesty and sincerity, through which to recompose the gap between rulers and ruled. These themes are already prefigured in *The Nowhere to Be Found People,* dated 1998, where he tried to outline a "sociological road to build the people"[11] – referring, for that purpose, especially to Proudhon's instructions. If Michelet proposed to unify the people through an identity and unitary principle by which its voice should emerge, Proudhon's lesson, followed in the same direction but via a different path, intended to give voice to the

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[7] *Ibid.*, Chap. I, Par. 3.

[8] Jules Michelet, "Course of 1847 at Collège de France", cit by Paul Viallaneix, *La Voie royale. Essai sur l'idée de peuple chez Michelet* (Paris: Flammarion, 1971).

[9] Cf. Jules Michelet, *The People* (Whitefish MT: Kessinger, 2010).

[10] Cf. P. Rosanvallon, *Le Peuple introuvable*, *op. cit.*, Chap. I, Par. 3.

[11] *Ibid.*

pluralisms of which the people are composed. According to Proudhon, in fact, "people seem to have a mystical existence: they manifest themselves rarely and in predestined times"[12]: "once the revolution has been made, people become silent again"[13]: according to him "it is assumed that people can be consulted, can respond and that their will may be verified"[14] but, "as being collective […], they have no mouth to talk"[15]. Hence some of the contradictions on which Rosanvallon concentrates his own reflections, recognizing the difficulty in making people speak and act. Clearly, suffrage does not seem to be most the appropriate way of giving voice to people, because it reduces them to an abstract and arithmetic entity, in which, simply, votes are counted. Moreover, suffrage expects in vain to give voice to people through "a simple mechanical sum of electoral cards"[16]. As a result, the necessity – typical of the XIX century – of the quest of a "good representation" (to which Rosanvallon opposed, in 2015, the quest of a "good government"), in order to imagine a "new work of representation"[17].

ii. "Counterdemocracy", "distrust" and "impolitic democracy" (in Counterdemocracy, 2006)

One of the most famous works of Pierre Rosanvallon, published in France in 2006 is titled *Counterdemocracy. Politics in an Age of Distrust*. In this text, as well as in his other works,

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[12] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Solution du problème social,* cit. in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Verboeckhoven & Cie éditeurs, 1868), 44.

[13] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Solution du problème social*, 37.

[14] *Ibid.*, 39.

[15] *Ibid.*, 38-39.

[16] Cf. Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le Peuple introuvable*, Chap. I, Par. 3.

[17] *Ibid.*, "Conclusion".

Rosanvallon focused on the importance of political language, whose evolution has contributed to generating distrust, thus producing the growing distance between politicians and citizens[18]. Among the causes of this "diagnosis" that Rosanvallon wished to make, he mentions, for example, "the betrayal of the promises made"[19] during the election campaign, recalling the famous theme of dichotomy between overpromising and underperforming. The spectacularization of the election campaign is likely to become the only way in which the political class speaks with citizens in order to gain consensus: after that, it locks itself away in the ivory tower of a caste who returns to dialoguing with people only to justify the impossibility of keeping the promises made during the election campaign. This constitutes, indeed, one of the mechanisms from which the distrust, that undermines the basis of contemporary representative democracies, is generated.

Throughout the text, Rosanvallon indicated, as essential steps for the healthy keeping of a new face of democracy, a series of actions and tasks in the hands of citizens (but associations as well, responsive organizations and, and in general all anti-democratic movements that deviate from the representation function), such as "guarding", "denouncing" and "verifying": all this, if a proper "trust" relationship (which must always accompany "legitimacy") is missing, may result in populism, product of "distrust", in which the "people" of the governed is opposed to the "power" of the rulers. We, therefore, have two forms of "distrust"": a positive

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[18] "Democratic ideology is now unchallenged, but the regimes that make reference to it arouse almost everywhere harsh criticisms. It is the great political problem of our time. The erosion of citizen trust in their leaders and political Institutions has become one of the most studied phenomena of political science over the last twenty years". Pierre Rosanvallon, *La contre-démocratie*, "Introduction".
[19] *Ibid.*

one, on which the "counter-democracy" must be founded as a counter product of institutional and institutionalized democracy (in order to exercise a real control over the latter), and a negative one, we might say, irreversible, typical of the populist movements. In this sense, so-called "counter-democracy" is proposed as a preventive countermeasure against populism which is made possible by transforming the "unreachable people" into a living community.

Rosanvallon deals with the theme of populism in the Fourth Chapter of his text titled "Impolitic Democracy". Here too, the connection with language is really strong, since populism is first and foremost a language, as Marco Revelli wrote:

> [An] American scholar [Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion. An American History*, Cornell U.P., Ithaca-London, 1998] considered populism 'more an impulse than an ideology', and even a 'language'. So, above all, a 'political style', a 'form' rather than a set of contents. But he came to the same conclusions of Mudde [Cas Mudde, *The Populist Zeitgeist*, in 'Government and Opposition', XXXIX (2004)] with regard to the fundamental 'bipolar' or 'bifocal' characteristic of 'populist syndrome': the determination to divide political space in 'high and low', in the contrast between 'the powerful and the powerless', the 'too powerful' and 'too little'[20].

Rosanvallon, in another work of his, titled "A Reflection on Populism", wrote:

> Populism can be understood as a form of simplifying and distorted response to these difficulties. Therefore, it cannot be conceived only as 'political style', as some define it, reducing it to its demagogic dimension[21].

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[20] Marco Revelli, *Populismo 2.0* (Torino: Einaudi, 2017), 15.
[21] Pierre Rosanvallon, *Pensare il populismo* (Roma: Castelvecchi, 2017), 16.

> If we want to understand democracy better, we must better grasp what populism is: because the understanding of democracy is inseparable from the understanding of its distortions[22].

Populism, therefore, represents a revolt of democracy against itself, and has become "a global structural fact of contemporary democracies."[23]. The essential feature of populism is, according to Rosanvallon, to simplify both the language and the Institutions of politics, reducing it very often to a Manichean combination that contrasts "good" and "bad" or "high" and "low". In order to cure this degeneration of democracy, according to Rosanvallon, it is necessary not to try to simplify it, but to complicate it, adding, for example, control counter-democratic forms and structures. Hence, in our opinion, the need of a new language of politics, capable of reconstructing the interrupted communication and the dialogue between rulers and ruled, making the demarcation line between Institutions and people, subtler. In other words, the dialogue between the two parts cannot be reduced to the rhetorics implemented during the phase of election campaign, but it must be constant and must also assume the forms of control, verification and judgement.

The theme of language, therefore, plays a central role also in counter-democratic activity, which, according to Rosanvallon, should be corroborated and partly institutionalized.

[22] *Ibid.*, 17.
[23] *Ibid.*, 20.

III

On "true speech" in *Le bon gouvernement*

i. *About "good government" and "democracy of trust"*

Consistent with his path of thinking, Pierre Rosanvallon, in his text dated 2015, *Good Government*, returns to question himself about the crisis of the democratic form of government, which needs to be refounded precisely through an attempt to "make society" through the reintroduction of diversity, and "control" by citizens. The latter, in fact, have gradually lost their trust in the political class, who has reduced its interaction with citizens to the mere media spectacularization that takes place during the election campaign. This has created a profound crisis in the representation of democracy, which linked to a "bad government" recurs in all Western democracies.

The Rosanvallon's aim is thus to revitalize the democratic system, introducing new lifeblood which, coming mainly from the citizens themselves, may help to improve their relationship with the Institutions. True democracy, or "good governance", must be based, in his opinion, on a new pact of trust, which is only possible by recovering the Greek sense of "*parrhesia*", which he expresses as "true speech" ("parler vrai"), as opposed to bad rhetoric, based on lies and no dialogue (but rather pure monologue) that distinguishes today's political class. With these words, Rosanvallon prefigured a hypothetical "fourth estate", on which he promises to work in his subsequent research.

In summary, this work by Rosanvallon describes, albeit through a historic reconstruction, the transition from a democratic ideal of "good representation" to an ideal of "good

government" that must be based on a new relationship between rulers and ruled.

The first chapter shows the genesis of the form of representative and parliamentary government in France and England, especially analysing the different relationship between Executive Power and the Parliament within the two nations. The second chapter deals with the French presidential government form, related to the idea of personalization of power in the figure of the political leader, as a response to the need of people, who desire to recognize themselves in him: in this juncture, he also dedicated himself to highlighting the limits and problems associated with this form of government. The third chapter, "Democracy of appropriation", discusses a democratic theory of government action, reflecting on the fact that ruled, unlike the rulers, may be called to participate in legislative but not in executive power: according to Rosanvallon, on the contrary, the true sense of democracy is supposed to consist in a way of exercising power, so that ruled people, even cooperating with non-governmental city organizations, may take part in the exercise of power. The fourth and last chapter, on which we will be focusing in the following pages, tries to isolate the qualities and the characteristics through which a new "democracy of trust" can be built: among those, Rosanvallon focused on the "true speech", based on the ideals of transparence, honesty and sincerity, from which citizens could return to rebuild a new relationship of trust with the Institutions.

ii. *About "true speech" and its utopias*

According to Rosanvallon, the current language of politicians of profession has become obsolete and outdated:

Public speech has become a dead speech [Manuel Valls, 'Discours de politique générale du 8 avril 2014'], claimed a French politician lately. This statement referred to the idea that language has become incomprehensible and inaudible[24].

Contemporary politics comes to talk to citizens only during the spectacularization of the electoral competition, but it is no longer able to speak to people in order to offer, for example, an account of its political action or to outline the horizon of its goals: public acts, laws and measures have become increasingly incomprehensible to the average citizen, whose distance from the democratic Institutions becomes more and more unbearable. According to Rosanvallon, if "true speech" is connected with the citizens' control activity (in order to build a positive relationship with political life), "fake-speech" is what amplifies the gap between citizens and Institutions: only "true speech" can consolidate a real relationship of trust, whose failing might undermine the foundations of contemporary democracies[25].

Democratic discourse, in order to be such, must not confine itself to guaranteeing freedom of speech, but must be grounded – according to Rosanvallon – on wider moral and social dimensions, an imperative of frankness, on a direct mode, on the absence of computation in expression and on a dialogical and empathic value with the others. It is easy to see how this resumes the classic canons of ancient rhetoric, which should not only be based on the five elements of the discourse (invention,

[24] Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le bon gouvernement*, 327.
[25] "True speech increases the citizens' power on themselves and allows them to create a positive relationship with politics. False speech or empty speech, on the contrary, increases the gap. In stronger words, political language is at the very heart of the building of a trustful relationship because it is in the feeling of rightness that lies the possibility to link present to future". Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le bon gouvernement*, 328.

arrangement, style, memory and delivery), but that – according, for example, to Cicero and Quintilian – should have, as well, the moral and cultural qualities of the speaker, who must possess an encyclopedic culture and offer an integer image of himself [26]. According to Rosanvallon, however, – in spite of what Cicero and Quintilian asserted – the ancient world already created the gap between politics and citizens, distinguishing between "parrhesia" (freedom of speech in the molar sense) and "rhetoric", recalling how the rhetorician had first of all to be convincing and not necessarily "to tell the truth". From here onward, according to Rosanvallon, two directions should be followed: the one of "parrhesia", or "true speech", and the one of "rhetoric", connected with seduction and flattery.

Rosanvallon continues by noting that true democracy can only be based on "true speech":

> This kind of 'false speech' has a more dreadful effect on democracy than the one of a rhetorician. Indeed, language has not only in this situation a function of seduction or dissimulation, it creates an artificial and caricatured world which banish any opposition or even the possibility of questioning the public affairs' management. It leads to, as a famous way of words says to 'eliminate reality in the mind instead of making the object more intelligible'[27].

Contemporaneity, added Rosanvallon, heir to this dualism, faces a general impoverishment of the language of politics:

> This kind of false speech, when it sustainably dominates, makes the *Country of the Disconcerting Lie* described by Anton Ciliga happen: where the poor

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[26] For a closer look at these topics, cf. Erasmo Silvio Storace, *I linguaggi politici della civiltà occidentale. Retorica, democrazia e populismo* (Milano: Jouvence, 2016), 103-110.

[27] Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le bon gouvernement*, 334.

power's language decreases and simplifies the world, in which there isn't contradictions and where individuals have resigned themselves to find some kind of comfort. This is far beyond the common art of polical lie described by Swift. Such a way to impose the simplification of language has been indeed driving the devitalisation of the notion of politics itself. Newspeak described by George Orwell in 1984 corresponds to the entry into such a literally decerebrate world[28].

In the continuation of his speech, Rosanvallon focuses on the languages of revolutionary utopias, and in particular on the strategies put into place to counteract true speech: among them, the most interesting, especially for the purpose of this discourse, is the one that deals with "the hatred of speech and the consequent worship of the slogan"[29]. Rosanvallon noted that one of the common traits of revolutionary movements (but also, we might add, of populist movements) consists in apostrophizing as "men of word" ("hommes de parole") the politicians of profession, underlining how the speech of the latter is flattened to the sterile slogan, effective during the performance of the electoral competition. The word, the custodian of an inexpugnable power, puts itself to the service of "fake-speech", in other words of "bad rhetoric" which fights against the "good rhetoric" of "true speech", in which the citizen ceases to be valid as an elector for as long as the electoral competition lasts, but becomes a "controller" and "guarantor" of the Institutions and their political action. Every revolutionary movement condemns these forms of "fake-speech", by asserting that the word itself is the true enemy (for example, the Leninist Regime expected to oppose to the "speech of hatred" a new attitude, based on dialogue, reseeing the Party as a "discussion group").

[28] *Ibid.*, 334-335.
[29] *Ibid.*, 335.

iii. *About "genesis" and the "battles" of "true speech"*

Even then, in ancient times, Greek civilization became aware of the value and power of rhetoric: it is no coincidence that precisely in the world in which democracy developed rhetoric was born as a "technique of persuasion" and "machine of consensus", and, right from the start, its potential was clear and exploited in different ways. Thus, "good rhetoric" is developed, in the pursuit of a collective good, and "bad rhetoric", for the profit of the rhetorician. Historically, politics have always used most the second of these two aspects, relegating the "true speech" (parrhesia) to the logical and philosophical sphere of the search for truth. In this scenario, the political discourse –Rosanvallon asserted – rises more and more to the "condition of power of action"[30], getting closer to that practical dimension from which the "true speech" gradually moved away. We might say that the summation of this thought is perceivable in *The Prince* by Machiavelli, in which he described what "benefits a Prince, so that he may be respected" and, among these characteristics, sincerity is not listed[31] – theme, the one of sincerity, very important to Kant, in the pages of *Pragmatic Anthropology* quoted

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[30] Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le bon gouvernement*, 342: "La parole s'élève au rang d'une puissance d'action".

[31] Machiavelli wrote: "Therefore, a wise prince should take a third course, choosing wise men for his state and giving only those free rein to speak the truth to him, and only on such matters as he inquires about and not on others. But he should ask them about everything and should hear their opinions, and afterwards he should deliberate by himself in his own way. And with these counsels and with each of his advisers he should conduct himself in such a manner that all will realize that the more freely they speak the more they will be acceptable to him. Besides these things, he should not want to hear any others, he should follow through on the policy decided upon, and he should be firm in his resolutions". Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Chap. XXIII.

by Rosanvallon. Sincerity should, therefore, become the paradigm not only of individual virtues, but also and above all of the say and of political action: it is, however, not so according to Rosanvallon, who distinguished, in the "bad rhetoric" of contemporary politics, an "electoral language", solely for the purpose of obtaining as many votes as possible, and a "government language", aiming to justify its own actions:

> True speech of ordinary times certainly more modestly lies on the idea of sincerity. However, it is not only a product of individual virtue, it is also the result of the quality of democratic life. We need to start from the fact that true speech has been undermined by a structural dualism of political language in democracy. The latter spreads into two levels which responds to various objectives. On the one hand, the language in electoral times, dominated by the fact that there is a competition to win the highest number of polls. On the other hand, governmental language, which aims to justify an action[32].

The two rhetorics, "electoral language" and "government language", are thus in other words two languages of politics, both extremely distant from "true speech" that has quit, according to Rosanvallon, the sphere of politics (or, at least, professional politics). The first one arises from seduction and accusations in order to gain the support of public opinion and discredit opponents, the second focuses on the justification of government actions, emphasizing, for example, the constraints of activity. According to Rosanvallon, this gap creates a real paralysis of democracy[33]. In addition to that, this gap tends to widen more and more, also because governmental rhetoric seeks to justify not being able to accomplish (we might say: under-maintaining) the

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[32] Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le bon gouvernement*, 343.
[33] *Ibid.*, 343.

promises of the electoral program (we might say: over-promising)[34].

In so doing, the citizen's commitment to "true speech" must be regarded as a task, in other words as a condition for its development:

> 'Citizens' engagement in favor of true speech must be understood as a condition to their development. Indeed, in the same way there is no demagogues without a crowd which is satisfied to be flattered, there is no double political language without schizophrenic citizens[35].

In this sense, Rosanvallon is able to conclude that "true speech" has a reflective dimension: it is not really a harbinger of a truth waiting to be revealed, but because it is based on the "recognition of the structural indetermination of the democratic idea, in which the fluctuation of words is often rooted"[36]. "True speech", in other words, refers to the fact that:

> democracy is defined from the permanent work of exploration of the terms of its own indetermination. In this way, it is enhanced by the tensions and contradictions that structurates it[37].

Once investigated the genesis of "true speech", Rosanvallon ponders its "battles": he lists here three terrains on which these battles take place: the "lie", the "monologues", and the new "language of intentions".

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[34] In this regard, Rosanvallon added the following: "The methods of the confrontation between the opposition and the governing majority enhances this effect by creating a form of permanent electoral campaign which mixes in an inextricable way both languages ". *Ibid.*, 344.
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] *Ibid.*, 345.

First, the battles of "true speech" are fought on the ground of "lies" ("mensonge"). In other words, the first battle should be to uncover "lies, approximations and the semantic games contained in the political discourse"[38] – we might say, to see the rhetorical mechanisms put into effect in the construction and display of the content of a political discourse. This necessitates a new type of supervision and control by citizens, linked mainly to the world of association or "responsible media", who should cooperate in this democratic work.

Second, the battle for true speech must assume the form of criticism against monologues in politics:

> The monologue is the autistic speech, the one of the no-conflict, rationalized with others. Indeed, the political debate happens to be emptied of its substance. It is reduced to a sterile juxtaposition of theses monologues. This pattern is the one of the trench war. It shows a very weak capacity to bring information and doesn't lead to argumentation. This is why it almost never leads to enlightening choices and to position problems[39].

The monologue represents the culmination of a zero-degree reduction of political debate, where speeches are gradually transformed into a succession of monologues, producing an "impoverishment of democratic life"[40]:

> The monologue indeed consists in a kind of speech that doesn't take any risk, that is never challenged, hidden behind the fortress of its statements. It contributes to stick to the existing positions as it invites citizens to flatly take a side by electing a given kind of speech rather than determines

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[38] *Ibid.*
[39] *Ibid.*, 346-347. Hence, Rosanvallon passed to analyze history of monologue in politics, showing a contraposition between the English and French models.
[40] *Ibid.*, 349.

themselves by examining and comparing facts and arguments. Citizens are in this way quartered to the role of passive citizens[41].

Thirdly, the battle for true speech concerns the advent of a "language of intentions" ("langage des intentions"):

> This is a new language, which has emerged in politics quite recently. It is correlated to the merge of a "powerless atmosphere" and of a feeling of confusion. This can be explained in two ways: citizens are confronted to a world in which the impersonal forces of the market and governance seem to reign whereas they can't have any influence on them. Citizens seem to conceive the way they exercise their power only in a way that we qualified as projective. This new speech emerges as the political speech increasingly becomes autonomous, which doesn't correspond to actions or reality but rather to intentions[42].

In Rosanvallon's opinion, this refers to a "positive universe", in which a " sense of moral control over things"[43] is restored. With "language of intentions" he does not refer to the classical language that puts certainty, makes promises, which is expressed through monologues or in a "politically correct" manner, but that tends to trap its listeners into a fictitious universe. This new language represents "something different":

> This is a language which corresponds to a way to perceive the world governed by intentions from which every reality would come. The idea to change the world consists of crossing swords from which a different world could emerge. This new language is becoming increasingly popular[44].

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[41] *Ibid.*
[42] *Ibid.*, 350-351.
[43] *Ibid.*, 351.
[44] *Ibid.*, 350-351.

It is a language that binds to the perception of a world governed by the intentions from which all the realities should proceed. The idea of changing the world consists, in this case, in fighting to impose other intentions from which a different world may emerge. This new language has the wind in its sails.

In other words, this new language, according to Rosanvallon, is becoming increasingly important in the various dimensions of current politics, especially in relation to the topics of current affairs economic policy, and foreign policy.

Rosanvallon concludes the second chapter of the fourth part of his volume dedicated to the "Good Government", concerning the languages of politics, by asserting that that it would be trivial to reduce this category of "true speech", as outlined here, to a mere act of control by citizens: it should rather be thought of as a category of political action, that "exists only as a permanent labour of critic reflection on political language"[45]. This matter, in the hands of citizens, of responsible press and of associations, should be considered as vital to democratic activity.

IV

Conclusions

The Good Government by Rosanvallon can certainly be considered an important work of history, focused on the different forms of democracy have taken place since the French Revolution, and up until the introduction of universal suffrage in the presidential elections in France. Writing the history of Democracy and Representation, means evoking some primary stages, such as the ones connected to Constituent Assembly and

[45] *Ibid.*, 352.

the Legislative Assembly of the French Revolutionary (which embodied popular sovereignty), or the French parliamentary system of the nineteenth century – which Rosanvallon punctually compared, in particular, with the English system. The following "Presidentialization" of French Democracy, in the twentieth century, also related to the extension of the universal suffrage, contributed, in Rosanvallon's opinion, to widen the gap between rulers and ruled, almost to suggest a sort of paradoxical "Republican Monarchy" in which the figure of the charismatic leader becomes central, following a logic of personalization that would only partially respond to social demand. In other words, Rosanvallon asserted, this process is likely to lead to "Caesarism" and is increasingly diverted from the idea of "Good Government" which, on the contrary, he intended to propose, hoping for political candidates who might be much closer to the citizens. Hence, his own democratic theory of government action (content of the third chapter, "Democracy of appropriation"): citizens should regain the democratic mechanism, not just by aspiring to legislate, or by participating in the drafting of laws, but by taking control of the decision-making centers of the executive power, transforming current oligarchies, disguised as democracies, into real democracies. Thus, there is a need to recreate a "democracy of trust" (fourth chapter), based on values like "true speech", which we discussed above, and on values such as transparency, honesty, integrity, and moral rigour, whereby people can return to put their trust and esteem in the rulers, today at the lowest historic level. In other words, according to Rosanvallon, it is not just about working in order to perfect the formal aspect of current representative democracies, but to intervene on its own content, acknowledging that history of universal suffrage, having reached its own climax, should allow that metamorphosis from a "democracy of authorization" to a "democracy of exercise", in which citizens should be allowed to

be present beside the rulers not only in the legislative aspect, but even more in the executive one.

In this sense, Rosanvallon's text is not limited to historical reconstruction, but comes to very interesting political and philosophical considerations, which deserve more space to be discussed in an exhaustive way, given that it recalls central aspects of how western life and culture are meant and rethought. Rosanvallon, starting from a descriptive approach, suggested a real regulatory political theory, denouncing the fact that the "vox populi" is not listened by the rulers (as can be seen in the aforementioned *incipit* of the text, "Our systems can be said democratic but we are not governed democratically"). The idea proposed by Rosanvallon, although well articulated in its concrete, practical implementation possibilities, is likely to lead to the philosophical-literary genre of utopia, which, from Plato onwards, imagines that the ideal State (from platonic "kallipolis" to the ideals cities described by Augustine, Moro, Campanella, Bacon, etc.) should be based on fixed and stable ideas-values, which today, in the analysis of Rosanvallon, are no longer called "idea of good" and "justice in itself" but "true speech", "honesty", "transparency", etc. It would be trivial to note how all this differs from the real attitudes of human souls: not only for the rulers, but for the ruled too, this demarcation line becomes very tenuous when it comes to probe vices and virtues of the single person. In other words, a possible wider interference of citizens within current democracies' decision-making agencies is not, in itself, assurance of greater transparency and honesty in the management of public affairs: it would suffice to recall the platonic tale of the Ring of Gyge[46], from which it is easy to

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[46] Cf. Plato, *Republic*, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vols. 5 & 6 translated by Paul Shorey (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1969), 359d et seq.

understand how even the most honest among the humble shepherds, when he realized he could do whatever he wanted without risking capture and punishment, would act to pursue his own benefits and not the common good. We may briefly recall that in this myth, Plato, tells of a pastor, Gyge (who is a dependent of the king of Lydia), who had descended into an abyss opened after an earthquake found, in the bowels of the earth, the corpse of a giant with a gold ring to the finger. After stealing the ring, during a meeting of shepherds, he realized that, by turning the ring cast, he could become invisible. Having understood the power of the tool, he used it to seduce the queen and, through her help, kill the king and take his place.

From this Platonic myth it is evident that

> no one is just of his own will but only from constraint, in the belief that justice is not his personal good, inasmuch as every man, when he supposes himself to have the power to do wrong, does wrong. For that there is far more profit for him personally in injustice than in justice is what every man believes […]. For if anyone who had got such a licence within his grasp should refuse to do any wrong or lay his hands on others' possessions, he would be regarded as most pitiable1 and a great fool by all who took note of it[47].

In other words, everyone, if given the absolute power of immunity, that is impunity, in case he used his power to commit crimes, would be led to exercise it in order to obtain personal gains. This is to say that, the more those who do not understand politics are called to govern, the more they face problems that are even bigger than those inherent to the representative system – which, certainly, is dealing with a profound crisis, that can hardly be overcome by abandoning a "democracy of authorization" in

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[47] Plato, *Republic*, 360c-d.

favour of a "democracy of exercise". Plato, who it is no surprise was already critical towards the form of democracy that we would call today "direct democracy", considered it necessary to acquire a long political, moral and philosophical education in order to gain access to public affairs: a pedagogy, or even better a psychagogy that, as Plato explained, for example in Phaedrus[48], should go hand in hand with "good rhetoric". The latter, unlike "parrhesia" evoked by Rosanvallon, should be thought as a synonym of "dialektiké techne", in other words "dialectic", as an essential moment of reasoning (discursive and dialogic) on which philosophy is based, as it is to investigate the "idea of good". This latter should not abstractly be understood as a principle that is transcendent and disconnected from reality, but it might be explained through the idea of "collective good", which true politicians, provided with an adequate formation, are supposed to follow. This is not to assert, here, that professional politicians are morally superior to ordinary citizens. On the contrary, hoped for is a competent political class, who might be able to conduct its work successfully in order to achieve the collective good of which it should have clear cognition, result of studies and experience. Of course, even the professional politician (like the ordinary citizen) can act dishonestly: the problem is, though, that ordinary citizens, albeit moved by the best intentions and the most rigorous honesty, may not always have the necessary time, will, competences, preparation and maturity to discern the technical and delicate issues. There are countless examples in this regard, also connected to recent issues, such as the Italian referendum on drills, or the Italian debate on whether or not to vaccinate infants: these are extremely sensitive matters that require a great deal of

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[48] Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus*, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9 translated by Harold N. Fowler (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1925).

knowledge that the common citizen normally does not possess, unless he abandons job and daily occupations, in order to dedicate himself not only to government activity but to the study of all these issues to become an active part in the legislative and executive mechanisms.

Rosanvallon intended to transform all citizens into professional politicians. We would be happy to entrust decisions to a political class which, if it can never be based on honesty and sincerity, may at least have the best possible preparation, not only from a technical point of view, but above all in the field of political science (which is no longer so obvious among politicians, especially when members of populist movements). That is to say that while Rosanvallon would like to make it easier and more affordable for everyone to become a politician: we, on the contrary, would like to make this accessibility even more difficult and tortuous, so that it may be managed, if not under the aegis of the utopian ideas of honesty and sincerity (cf. "Idea of Good" understood in a transcendent way), at least under the aegis of competence – in the conviction that an appropriate training course can also help to reflect not only on what the politician has to be competent, but also on the notion of responsibility (cf. "Idea of Good" as "common good"). However, these brief notes would need another venue to be elaborated.