

# A Century of wise criticism for the Political science

Review of "Logica e Polemica. La scienza politica di Giovanni Sartori", // *Pensiero Storico*, 16, 2024, 13-146 edited by Marco Valbruzzi

The journal "Il Pensiero Storico" dedicates the last number of the 2024 to the centenary of G. Sartori. M. Valbruzzi is the editor of this special issue that brings together contributions from various authors, and interviews with "heirs" and companions of the great Italian political scientist. In both cases it is not a mere celebration of an important anniversary. Sartori's work is "dissected", recognised for its value but also criticised, following the fruitful tradition of Sartori's "thinking against".

D. Fisichella recounts his meeting with Sartori. These were the pioneering moments of political science in Italy, and they also contribute to elucidating the subsequent relationship between the discipline and political institutions. G. Pasquino considers this relationship challenging since from the outset, showing the threat for the political science to be marginalised. Among many possible solutions to avoid this fate, a good strategy is certainly a return to Sartori's legacy, to his studies and his democratic theory. This is considered a challenging task due to the absence of clear Sartori's successor and school of thought, and also the today tendency to prioritise more immediate, albeit less disruptive, issues. A notable point of discussion is the political culture of Italians, the relationship «of citizens and their relationship with politics» (26). On this issue, the authors diverge in their views. G. Urbani defends the premises of the Italian political science project and advocates for some changes to be made over the last few decades. In conclusion, for all these Sartori's "heirs" there are some central points, such as return to the "masters", to the main discipline of philosophy and history, and to join tradition with the today major issues. It is also necessary embrace the logic of complexity, the only way to fulfil today's society's need for a rigorous and practicable science of politics.

More substantial contributions are the work of authors who are more distant in time from the heroic period of Sartori's political science. In the concluding essay, "Logica e Polemica", M. Valbruzzi justifies this choice as necessary to «create a critical distance» in order to place «[...] Sartori's work not in his time but in ours» (144). The author traces the origins of the harsh confrontation that the young Sartori engaged with B. Croce's idealism. He provides a reconstruction of some of the epistemological foundations of Italian political science, including the "thinking against" model that characterised Sartori's approach, offering a critical evaluation. An enterprise of clarification and philosophical opposition, which half a century later must be contextualised, as opposed to being internalised dogmatically. Also A. Campati highlights Sartori's polemical style as a central feature of his work. In "Difesa dell'élite e del potere verticale", the author examines Sartori's position during the 4th World Sociology Conference (1959). The result is a unique conception of democracy for that era, that will be defined as «harmonious and geometric» (85). The Sartori's theory aim to safeguard the "aristocratic" component of democracy. Even here it is possible to underpin the Sartori's persistent interest for

language, signifiers, and their use. This is well evident through the obsessive definition for the term "élite", probably one of the most frayed by conceptual stretching in nowadays.

Language ("verbal behaviour") is also the focus of M. Zulianello's contribution. In the article entitled "La politica antisistema ai tempi del populismo" the author aims to update Sartori's insights on anti-system parties by linking them to today's populism. He begins clarifying some of the typical misunderstandings with which this category has been associated in the last decades, such as the overlapping between anti-system and anti-democratic. He tackles the rigidity of Sartori's parameters, which today's populist parties challenge through an "ambiguous" delegitimization, to finally propose a two-dimensional analysis (120) that goes beyond the classical definition, taking account of ideological orientation (discourses) and visible interactions (practices). E. Pizzimenti aims to shed new light on a "forgotten" part of Sartori's theory of parties. In "Un'impresa (purtroppo) incompiuta", the author addresses a less famous strand such as the analysis of the organisation and function of parties at a systemic level. The author's focus is on an article written in 1967 but only published in 2005: *Party Types, Organisation and Function*. Pizzimenti's contribution is to articulate the ideas of this seminal work with what Sartori wrote years later, especially with *Parties and Party Systems* (1976), with the aim of suggesting an empirical and systemic analysis that would still be of great value today.

The final essays address the more ideological and philosophical issues of Sartori's formation. S. Ventura returns to the intricate relationship that Sartori had with Croce's idealism, and thus to the theme of the autonomy of political science. The starting point is the clash between Croce and Einaudi over the distinction between political liberalism and economic liberal approach, which had a great impact on Sartori as well as on contemporary political philosophers such as Bobbio. However, despite the relevance of that debate, the author highlights a certain ambiguity. On one hand, Sartori is reluctant to embrace Croce's distinction; on the other hand, he avoids supporting the economist-centric vision of liberalism proposed by Einaudi. Finally, D. Palano, addresses Sartori's intellectual hostility towards Marcuse and other intellectuals. His genealogy leads him to show how Sartori attributed the fortunes of the Frankfurt School to the "censored" influence of C. Schmitt. "L'elastico di Carl Schmitt" retraces the "whirl" experienced by a young Sartori in facing the tour de force of the *Begriff des Politischen*. In his contribution, Palano illustrates some of Sartori's precise criticisms on the recursive nature of Schmitt's categories. However, at the same time, he underpins some misdirected invectives that reveal the unbridgeable distance between the jurist who placed the *amicus/hostis* distinction at the centre of his work, and the political scientist who developed a theory of democracy without enemies.

In this special issue, M. Valbruzzi and the other authors have not limited themselves to mere celebration. Rather, they have tried to reclaim an unedited Sartori, always on the frontier, in order to start a new season of reflection and renewal of the discipline. After all, a "polemic made with logic", «that builds, not that demolishes» (146), is certainly the best centenary gift that could be given to a great teacher like Sartori.