LAW, MORAL LAW AND POLITICS IN ERIC WEIL

BY

MARCO FILONI

© 2019 – *Philosophy and Public Issues (New Series)*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2019): 107-128
Luiss University Press
E-ISSN 2240-7987 | P-ISSN 1591-0660

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Law, Moral Law and Politics in Eric Weil

Marco Filoni

The symbolic value of law has lost its power. Law is no longer a stone wall, as Hannah Arendt called it in her reading of the political dimension in the *polis* of ancient Greece (Arendt 1998). Over the centuries, the wall has begun to crumble and, despite efforts to re-build it, higher and stronger, the law conceived as solid, foundational and unmovable has been revealed to be a mere myth, a splendid myth. Plato wrote in the *Laws*: "And let the first of them be the law of Zeus, the god of boundaries. Let no one shift the boundary line either of a fellow-citizen who is a neighbour, or, if he dwells at the extremity of the land, of any stranger who is conterminous with him, considering that this is truly *to move the immovable*" (842).

This is the starting point of Denis Baranger's analysis contained in his latest book: only by making the law sacred again can we also understand its crisis.

This is not a peculiar aspect of our times: many moments in history have experienced the effects of the law's loss of symbolic strength: "Law is devalued. The word *law* does not carry the same symbolic weight it had in different times in history. The law-making and enforcing zeal generally ascribed to the French Revolution or the time of the Napoleonic Codes today appears to

© 2019 – *Philosophy and Public Issues (New Series)*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2019): 107-128
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us as the symptom of a not entirely understandable and somewhat deplorable political delusion. This symbolic devaluation has resulted in a loss of efficacy. The law, therefore, is often seen as ineffective in addressing societal problems and reflecting the preoccupations of its political community. Legislation lends itself […] to be constantly regarded as ineffectual or even of illegitimate" (Baranger 2018, 9ff). It might appear that the two categories, the sphere of the sacred and the essence of crisis, are indissoluble: law, as conceived by Hobbes, cannot exist without its opposite, chaos – in a kind of *indifferentiation,* to use Gadamer's definition, where the acts of investiture and foundation are tied to a sacrificial crisis.[1]

In fairness, the accusation of ineffectiveness is often wielded against constructs other than the law. Democracy, too, is often seen as existing in a perpetual state of crisis. Is it because the democratic order, itself so often sacralised through the ages, has to be cast in the role of the victim, of the scapegoat – for it to function better than before?

I

The value of effectiveness

Despite all the inevitable questioning, the notion of democracy has survived to become a fixture of our age. We export it, we defend it, we fight for it. But are we sure we know what it is? We are often satisfied by simply articulating the word *democracy*, a concept so rich in positive and permanent values, certain that we could not possibly live

[1] Girard 1982; the same author has also examined the paralysing dialectics of sacrifice in Girard 1972. See Alfieri 2003 e Bellei 1999.

without it. But do we truly know what we are talking about? Or is it just what we were told – received wisdom, definitive and not negotiable?

We can improve our understanding by examining Eric Weil's writings on the subject, as a means to assessing the role of the sacralisation/crisis nexus within democracy, as if it were one of its implicit philosophical aspects.

The topic has not been explicitly addressed in Weil's three major works: *Logique de la philosophie* (1950), *Philosophie politique* (1956) and *Philosophie morale* (1961). These writings saw the light in a philosophical context dominated by marxism, existentialism, phenomenology, structuralism, psychoanalysis, but Weil's thinking distrusted all schools and, by refusing to be reduced to any one of them, deliberately ignored them.

Weil debates the problem of "violence", thought and understood as a possible course of action for mankind, as a free act of will that can be made sense of only within the scope of philosophy, which is in essence its exact opposite, the denial of violence.

In 1950, Weil published alongside *Logique de la philosophie* a little golden book dedicated to Hegel (Weil 1950b). Here, in a few clear pages, he dismantles one by one the many fallacies circulating at that time (and not only at the time) within the extensive literature addressing Hegel's philosophy of law. As it was correctly observed, "if Weil's intention is to show how Hegel views politics as the achievement of a philosophical science of reasonable will, and cannot therefore give up reformulating once again the old philosophical concept of *freedom within the situation* (…), it is therefore necessary to emphasize how the will always gives itself a content which is mediated by practical reason: freedom itself. This is only

possible by accepting the existence of 'a reasonable and universal organization of freedom', which is the state, a structure that allows thought to give itself a reality – to be *effective*" (Palma 2017, 111).

In Weil's reading (that owes a lot to the famous lectures of Alexandre Kojève) the declared goal of every kind of conflict is *recognition* (*Anerkennung*), even in the pre-statual sphere which precedes the foundation of a state or a political community. Thus, effectiveness becomes a value, detached from any teleology of reason: effectiveness becomes a "sacred" of our times, indispensable for the enactment of reason.

But how do we ensure such political effectiveness is reasonable (balanced) and usable by and within democracy?

II

Democracy as debate and public reason

We can attempt to answer by looking at another two of Weil's writings: the first appeared in 1950 with the title *Limites de la democratie* (Weil 1950a); the second was published one year later, in English, *Democracy in a World of Tensions* (Weil 1951). Though Weil is well aware that no political system can be entirely described as a democracy, his main concern is to try to define it – the etymology of the term is not helpful in this respect, since the word democracy is meaningless: the people are considered as a mass, and a mass, as Canetti observed (Canetti 1960), is unable to act positively; if on the other hand we consider the people as an organized community, one that is able to take positive action, then the

term 'democracy' comes to define a Constitutional State (Weil 1957).

Defining democracy is far from straightforward: absolute monarchy, tyranny, aristocracy and even dictatorship all present distinctive and recognizable features, thanks to which it is possible to tell whether a certain form of political aggregation corresponds to such a kind of organization or not.

"It is not the same for democracy: do we not sometimes refer to a particular state as being a democratic monarchy, a democratic dictatorship, a democratic aristocracy, and do we not often identify democracy with ochlocracy? Of course, we could solve the problem by formulating a rigid definition. But, however legitimate, this shortcut would still be unsatisfying. Political terms maintain their scientific sense only in science books, while the life of a community does not manifest according to the rules of clear speech, but in words weighed down with positive and negative values, preferences, feelings – and the possible or unavoidable logical consequences that worry theorists do not matter much" (Weil 1950a, 35).

This is why Weil is so cautious when using the term "democracy" in his *Philosophie politique*, compared to these two later essays. He is keen to avoid using terms which are charged with symbolic value, rich in connotation (positive or negative) – this probably explains why in *Philosophie politique* he abstains from using the terms "totalitarianism" and "dictatorship" as well, having nonetheless addressed such concepts in a number of interesting and clear essays (Weil 1991).

Weil is not interested in achieving the logical consistency of the theoretician, to be someone who is satisfied with being right, even if nobody really listens to what he says or finds it

relevant. Weil's ambition is to engage with reasonable political life, he is only interested in elaborations which are truly *effective* (not by chance, one of his favourite thinkers is Machiavelli).

If we want to take as our starting point political reality as experienced in daily life (a concept summarized by Weil with two succinct examples: Lincoln speaking of the "government of the people, by the people, for the people" and the French motto "liberté, egalité, fraternité"), a constitutional state is necessary, as it guarantees freedom of speech to all citizens who have the right to take part in political decisions.

"*Democracy* can be described as based on reasonable and rational discussion" (Weil 1956, 218): such is Weil's premise: among the founding principles of democracy we find not only universality, but also freedom of speech (that is: the right to take part in the public debate assured to all individuals who, for this reason, can and must participate without fear). This is after all, Weil explains, the implicit pre-condition for equality: "Democracy may be said to exist when all members of a community are able to partake, on an equal basis, to the discussion of public affairs" (Weil 1951, 432).

III

The social sphere of democracy

Weil's thinking preceded that of other philosophers such as Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, who assigned great importance to the public dimension – following in the steps of Hegel and Kant (rooted in Hume): the public sphere allows free and reasonable discussion and, furthermore, recognizes its essential political role.

Every political decision is always subjected to the scrutiny of public opinion: the majority of citizens is not only influential and expresses itself freely, it also asserts direct or indirect control over political action. Citizens choose their representatives to administer public affairs, according to rights guaranteed by a body of rules (a constitution) by which everybody must abide (Weil 1951, 425).

Nevertheless, Weil adds, procedures (laws) can be formulated in ways that render ineffective, illusory, the rights they are meant to protect.

What is more, we cannot take for granted that all citizens will be able and willing to participate in the public debate: they might be uneducated and therefore ill equipped to understand the importance of the issues discussed, or they may have no interested in them. In the end, life conditions are crucial in allowing everybody to take part in democracy: social and financial pressures can determine one's exclusion from active political life.

Thus, Weil connects the political sphere, at least within a democratic regime, to the social sphere – positing the latter as the pre-requisite for the former.

"It would be tempting to believe that in such way we may bridge the apparent contradiction between the neutrality of democracy as posited by classical (meaning ancient Greek) constitutions and the existence of an institutional problem within democracy. But such an issue would simply appear on a different historic level, one consisting of vast states, large populations and a perfected system of material, intellectual and administrative communications – states with a highly centralized government and economy, in which community

members are socially integrated and strongly interdependent" (Weil 1950a, 36).

Weil turns his gaze towards the formal democracies of the XIX century, describing them as characterized by two main features: first of all, juridical and political equality; secondly, social equality – thus identifying the need to guarantee increased wellbeing for an increasing number of people. Such is the material and moral progress of mankind, the result of an essentially negative action: reducing inequality among individuals leads to their liberation. We are all aware that this theory drowned in the sea of revolts and revolutions that marked the XIX century, "a century that believed in the disappearance of the state: mankind, according to this view, is intrinsically reasonable, violence had already been overcome, all there was left to do was to erase its last traces. We can envy such optimism, but we can no longer share it" (Weil 1950a, 28).

Having lost such optimism, our age has come to recognize the need for organized action by the state: "the state, and the democratic state perhaps above all, must consciously seek out the true interest of the citizen, promote material progress by eliminating violence ('social stresses'), and, through material progress, promote moral progress toward the ideal of nonviolence" (Weil 1951, 426).

The fundamental problem with democracy, according to Weil, lies in the fact that it is not only a government system established and controlled by the people, but also a government system in charge of educating people towards the safeguarding of democracy. Man does not inevitably relinquish the use of violence, he is not reasonable by nature – but he *can* and *must* become reasonable. It is all the more interesting to notice that the concept is expressed using very similar, almost

identical words, in the two essays on democracy written by Weil: "We talk about educating the reason through reason, to attain universal reason: we demand that every man is entitled to such education, that nobody is excluded, and that anyone can take part in the elaboration of social projects – but under the condition that everyone renounces violence and is ready to change his mind. Maybe there is nothing less democratic than the introduction of formal democracy, and it does not matter when and in which context: hunger, oppression (not only in terms of oppression by law enforcement), deprivation of dignity and hope do not make perfect citizens. But education must not be misunderstood and cannot be mistaken for tyranny: it is enough to assess if such education is welcomed by those who receive it and is increasingly created with the contribution of those who receive it – or if, on the contrary, suspicion between government and people grows deeper, if the *raison d'état* comes to oppose the reason of individuals; if, in short, citizens participate, in time, more or less, to public affairs" (Weil 1950a, 39).

IV

Democracy and the common good: Weil and Arendt

In this matter, Weil's stance is quite different from Arendt's. According to Weil, the necessary conditions for democracy are: "Equality of all citizens before the law; equal political rights for all adult citizens; the acquisition of these rights by all who reside in the relevant territory, or at least all who are born and habitually reside there; a government elected by and subject to the control of all citizens; eligibility of all citizens for public office; and the protection of citizens against public persecution on grounds of opinion" (Weil 1951,

426). There is a strong reference to the social context here. Social context is what guarantees the formal conditions for democracy. According to Hannah Arendt, on the other hand, politics are bound to fail as soon as they get themselves entangled in the social question. This is one of the key theses of *On Revolution*: political action loses its essential element of freedom when it becomes the administration of social needs (Arendt 1963). As a support for her thesis she recalls the French Revolution, which evolved into a tyranny as soon as the revolutionaries attempted to solve the "problem of bread".

The divergence between Weil and Arendt in the way they articulate the political problem rests on the distinction between *private good* (individual) and *common good* (universal). The classical definition of democracy implies the right of the individual to work in order to fulfil his/her own needs and wishes, to pursue his or her happiness – within the framework of the law, abiding the law. Democracy, however, also recognizes the government's right to pursue the common good, which is defined in social and material terms. In other words, the political order (the state, the government) has to guarantee and respect individual freedoms, but must also intervene and manage personal interests if they risk harming the collective. What is at stake here is the possibility of reconciling the universal and the particular: the pursuit of the common good does not imply an exclusive focus on society's collective life, leaving aside all that is individual and corporative, allowing individuals to fulfil their desires and pursue their own welfare autonomously. As observed by an acute critic, "Hannah Arendt's solution consists in separating the universal of political action of the particular from the sphere of social interests. Conciliation takes place through a separation of spheres. On the one hand, the freedom enjoyed

by individuals within the common action in which their individual personality is revealed; on the other, the sphere in which their needs are fulfilled through work, where natural inequalities and subordination relationships reign" (Canivez 1993, 209-10).

V

The moral foundation of politics

The fact that Weil sees the social context as a necessary pre-condition for democracy stems from his general conception of political philosophy. Political philosophy should be considered only in relation to human action. The concrete understanding of human action is the goal of political philosophy alone. Political science, or any hypothetical-deductive theory, inevitably views political reality from a certain perspective. No matter how objective it tries to be, it is unsatisfactory for a man of action, because it cannot show him how to pursue his end or, most of all, how to provide a (normative and ethical-normative) framework to his pursuit. Action needs criteria, and only political philosophy can conceive such criteria and assist individuals in making their aims and desires come true. We are firmly within the domain of morality. Since people live in communities, only moral criteria will allow them to navigate the world they live in and make sense of it. But this can happen only if they want it: it is a choice that exists in the sphere of the politics-morality nexus. Only by achieving a positive alignment of the two can we solve the problem that action poses. Nevertheless, at any time we can fall into the trap of thinking we must choose *between* politics and morality, acting like a true moralist or a pure politician. We are always in danger of choosing one

over the other. Let history teach us something, Weil suggests. "There is no doubt: to choose is indeed possible. The proof is that men have always chosen, opting for one of the two possibilities and excluding the other; Epicurus and Francis of Assisi refused politics; Gengis Khan and Hitler didn't devote their sleepless nights to the solution of moral problems" (Weil 1962, 241-42). It is possible to choose one domain over the other, but such a choice implies giving up on the possibility of understanding reality, renouncing philosophy.

According to Weil, we need to achieve a satisfactory definition of the relationship between morality and politics. In sum: morality does not exist and does not become a reality outside of the political domain, but (reasonable) politics inevitably exists only for those who posed themselves the moral problem, since only through the position of this problem, can politics give reasonable answers. Only in such way can the idea of political philosophy acquire meaning outside of its historiographic value (Weil 1956, 27-28).

It is morality, therefore, that gives politics a philosophical meaning. But for the man of action, this moral imperative turns into a need for social justice, for education. For the individual in general, this moral necessity is the quest for happiness, for the satisfaction of material and other needs, for a life imbued with sense. This happens because men live together inside a determinate political community. "Moral life cannot be known or achieved outside of a community, a community that is moral, which is to say, capable of a higher form of morality" (Weil 1961, 212). This is the trait of all great political philosophies after Machiavelli: the acknowledgement of political reality and of the necessity of political realism.

Moral necessity is founded in the principle of the formal moral of universality – hence, in the loss (or the refusal, the Hegelian recognition) of the world of concrete morality, the loss of the world of *certainty*. Said loss allows man to understand the world. Only in the state of uncertainty and precariousness in which he dwells will he feel the urge to think. Banished from the realm of certainty, man lives and acts in the world "as a possibility among a theoretically infinite number of others and feels, therefore, compelled to *choose* a way, a goal, a sense, an orientation" (Weil 1956, 24). When he lives within the realm of certainty, every individual has *a morality*. Only when he comes in contact with other communities does talking of (plural) "moralities" make sense. They are still concrete moralities, systems of mores, beliefs and institutions that determine and structure the life of a community. In other terms, the pattern of behaviours and representations (the idea of good and evil, of right and wrong) that all members of the community share. The mere discovery of alternate "concrete (plural) moralities", made when one comes into contact with other communities, is cause for struggle.[2]

Becoming aware of other possibilities is a source of concern, because for the first time one doubts one's own mores and the existence of the principles that form a concrete morality. This state of uncertainty of any system of concrete morality comes to the surface in the relationship with other moralities: "The conflict of moralities, the discovery of contradictions within a morality (which become visible only

[2] See, as for the problem of concrete moralities and, most of all, the conflict they can raise, the debate on multiculturalism that started with Taylor 1994.

after such a conflict has come to life) brings forward a general reflection on morality" (Weil 1961, 13).

VI

The law of politics

The principle of a formal morality of universality, which we briefly considered through the prism of Weil's reflection, provides political action with a choice: the coming of a world where reason may inspire all human beings. It was not easy to get to this point, the philosopher adds. "The combined effort of over twenty centuries was what it took for this principle of morality to be articulated in its purity by Kant" (Weil 1956, 25).

Weil goes further. His entire thinking is assertively Kantian in essence. "The universal problem of a universal moral and of universality has come to dominate speculative thinking (it easy to say when, because it coincides with the Kantian revolution, which had far more radical and far-reaching consequences in the domain of morality than in that of metaphysics – one cannot understand the latter without putting it into a relationship with the former); but what appeared at the time was a *truth*, leaving aside the fact that it had to be discovered" (Weil 1961, 100). Moral philosophy cannot avoid contemplating the problem of the foundation of moral laws, because moral law appears as an enunciation for the philosopher to problematize, it is not a given, a preliminary fact. Moral law has to be considered in Kant's perspective, as it had been developed in the *Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Sittten* and in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, in other words as a proposition the meaning of which can be found only within the philosophical discourse that we hold as

valid and that questions the validity of any other philosophical discourse.

Weil reinterprets the Kantian imperative: "I must always behave in such way *that I should wish my maxim became a universal law"* (Kant 1785, 401). According to Kant, this is truly the crux of the matter – which he also comes back to elsewhere in his works, as for example in his conception of *Publizität*. Kant defines it as the sphere where "people" can behave as "citizens", where they can emerge from their state of "minority" and *rationally* take part in the life of the state. Law creates this sphere, the domain of the "public", a space of expression where the ethical-political element freely acts in the open. The domain of law is also a place where the juridical postulate can be mediated by the categorical imperative and produce the reconciliation of morality and politics. The imperative comes to be reformulated in the *transcendental formula of law*: "act as if the maxims [of your action] were to become through your will a universal law (whatever the end [of your action] may be)" (Kant 1795, 377). In other words, morality founds politics from a historical and rational perspective; moral imperative becomes politics.

But here is where Weil distances himself from Kant. According to Kant, man is likely to put his individual goals before the universal ones, thereby disobeying the moral imperative in his own conscience. Nevertheless, man always carries the law inside his conscience (the law is inside him, even if he doesn't heed it). Weil, on the other hand, admits the possibility of a rebellion against the law, of refusing to respond to a moral conscience and choosing violence. It is a refusal of morality that corresponds to a refusal of coherent discourse: violence. It is a man's duty to refuse it, and to choose reason. Weil states that "duty is the only fundamental

category of morality." But it is always a duty toward oneself. "The concept of duty toward oneself expresses the fact that, *per se*, the individual is not made of pure reason and cannot be reduced to what tradition calls his reasonable side. He *wants* to be reasonable: he wants to act according to the principle of universality, but he is a finite, passionate being, a subject of needs and desires who is exposed to temptations. In this sense, the individual really becomes an object and a material in himself, the finite being for the reasonable being, and he really wants to become it, because it is his duty" (Weil 1961, 101). Such a duty undergoes a transformation of sorts as soon as it moves from being a duty toward oneself to a duty toward others. This is the way the moral man finds his fulfilment. But how can such a man do his duty toward others? How can he recognize it? Weil has no doubt: "The duties of the moral being toward others stem out of the fundamental duty of justice" (Weil 1961, 110). It is a question of recognizing other individuals as reasonable beings, as equals, and in wanting their dignity. This is how they recognize themselves as reasonable. Justice is to demand that the individual comes to be recognized as reasonable from a political, social and institutional perspective. It means to satisfy the legitimate desires of individuals inside the historical world. That is, desires that can be universalized inside a given society in a given age. This is the way to guarantee a life in which posing oneself moral questions makes sense, because one does not feel the pressure of material needs and the necessity to arrange solutions for them.

Politics are superior to morality as long as politics is founded on morality in an attempt to actualise it within the community. Community makes the moral life of the individual possible.

Only in such way, morality – which serves an end – also finds its end. If morality is understood correctly, as soon as it achieves its goal – satisfying man in his quest for dignity, satisfying the conditions and needs of people, making them happy – it reaches the end of its path. It proves its fulfilment by simply disappearing as a problem (for the reasonable man). It is from here that we must consider politics. "It is not an hyperbole to state that the political, if understood correctly, is morality in progress, or rather, that morality is essentially politics, existing in a strict relationship with a community of individuals searching for personal happiness, if happiness is not sought outside this world" (Weil 1956, 22).

There is an objective primacy of politics. Morality can exist and be achieved only through politics. Here, once more, we see the return of Machiavelli. The Florentine secretary was the first to formulate the line of enquiry that Weil is developing. But it remains a subjective priority – objectively subjective – of morality: politics that aim to be reasonable can only be imposed upon those who address the problem of morality. Otherwise, politics are a mere struggle for power. There is no moral problem of power – in itself, power is neutral as much as passion and life. The problem of power exists only for morality, not the other way around.

"The core of the problem is very simple: there is no moral problem for power, the only problem is that of power for morality. Actually, it is absurd to expect power to be moral, it is as absurd as expecting nature or passion to be moral. It is perfectly legitimate, perfectly natural, to ask morality and reason engage with the problem of how they will become reality on the plan of power" (Weil 1957, 207).

Weil's whole political thought is firmly grounded in Kant. Weil takes from Kant the key traits of his concept of history

and the moral foundations of action. But, as said, it is easy to taste the dash of Machiavelli in his Kant, when it comes to the concept of power developed by the Florentine philosopher in *The Prince*. Weil can be defined as the only philosopher after Kant who re-founded politics and philosophy on morality. But he did add Hegel, specifically his elaboration of history in an absolutely coherent discourse. Also, he moves beyond Hegel, as he does not develop this discourse in an ontology, but into a moral choice that produces a philosophy of sense. One should not forget that moral will and reasonable actions are historically determined: it is in modern society that they must perform and free the individual from immediate needs and from violence.

VII

Educating towards democracy

It is time to point out one more element. According to Weil, the function of politics is essentially educational. The same is true for democracy. According to Weil, education must lead to awareness of the concrete sense, it must improve self-consciousness and reflection, promote the will to understand and understand oneself "in a world where men not only think about the maxims that inspire their own actions, but act in accordance to an existing morality, a world where the education of each and every one to the universality of reasonable freedom is not just a philosopher's dream but, rather, where such an education is real and perceived as real. It is a world that does not have to die so that morality and education can maintain their purity, but it has to live to educate to morality and to freedom in reason. It is only in this light that morality and education, far from being old-

fashioned, can be understood in their positivity, in their meaning for the world and for the man who wants to be reasonable" (Weil 1956, 51).

Not only reason, but democracy as well needs an educative approach. The two texts appear not by chance at the beginning of the nineteen-fifties: no one at the time could fully take for granted, in the years of Europe's post-war reconstruction, that shaking the very notion of democracy to its roots would inevitably give it new strength. However often we take democracy for granted, it is a moving concept, a concept "in progress". It is in essence an education to reason: "Wherever democracy exists, the problems you encounter are quite similar, without being the same: democracy does not necessarily withstand any challenge, any tension, any injustice by virtue of some kind of grace of the state. Any nation can revert to a situation where democracy becomes an impossibility, if an unreasonable and reckless majority exacerbates a minority and instigates it to rebel. Once democracy is established, it is vital that citizens are happy, each his own material and moral situation. Everywhere, democracy is a march toward reason, a perpetual education of man delivered by man himself, so that each man can really and fully be a man. Democracy is nowhere: it is always yet to be achieved" (Weil 1950a, 39).

Here is the problem of morality and politics, the responsibility of which weighs heavy on the shoulders of any democratic order. The democratic state must be committed to safeguarding the existing morality and the interests of society, mediating between individual welfare and the common good. Also, it must reinvent values, protecting them from the dangers of violence and boredom, it has to safeguard the existing morality and yet modify it for it not to clash with

universality. This is the social dynamic which began in the 20th century, its rational organization, a society in which the individual can easily feel dehumanized, bored, and tempted to resort to violence. It is the sort of *disenchantment* articulated by Max Weber, the advent of a technical world devoid of the sacred, which produces nostalgia for a life imbued with meaning.

It is in such a context that the efficiency of a democracy has to be assessed by its limits and the tensions it brings to light, through the hard times when it may appear hopelessly doomed, awaiting sacrifice, and where, instead, it may rise up once again, fortified. It is a march, an education. In Weil's words, it is a *creed*: "The limits of democracy? The limits do exist. Historical limits, limits posed by social conditions, ideological limits. None of them are definite, none are insurmountable by men of good will and – of course – sane reason; but they will not be overcome if one does not recognize and unmask the lack of clarity and the laziness of heart and mind which can exist under the disguise of good intentions. Man is able to create a humane world; this is the *creed* of democracy, and this *creed* distinguishes the democratic person. It is necessary that he learns how to pursue it in a reasonable way, in the conditions the historical reality offers him as the only field of his action" (Weil 1950a, 39).

Fesvem Research Unit

University of Florence

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