

SYMPOSIUM  
LE BON GOUVERNEMENT



*A DISCUSSION ON THE FUTURE OF  
DEMOCRACY  
WITH PIERRE ROSANVALLON*

BY  
SALVATORE MUSCOLINO

[THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK]

## *A Discussion on the Future of Democracy with Pierre Rosanvallon*

Salvatore Muscolino

To read the books of Pierre Rosanvallon is always a stimulating experience. The author's competences and interests span from history to political science, from philosophy to sociology; and in a cultural age such as ours, which is characterised by a sort of obsession for "specialization", scholars who manage a multidisciplinary scope represent a source of enrichment for us all.

In this issue of *Philosophy and Public Issues*, we discuss his book *Le Bon Gouvernement* and this is an excellent opportunity to critically reflect on the transformations which democratic western societies are undergoing today. It would not be a mistake, in my opinion, to consider this book as a *Summa* into which the themes and the problems dealt by the Author during his career converge, with particular reference to his recent and famous trilogy dedicated to contemporary democratic societies. I refer to: *La contre-démocratie. La politique à l'âge de la défiance* (2006), *La légitimité démocratique. Impartialité, réflexivité, proximité* (2008) and *La société des égaux* (2011).

Thanks to these works, Rosanvallon is one of the protagonists of the widespread debate, which has developed in recent years, which concerns the future of what are generically defined as "Democratic Societies". However, just glancing at the titles of some of the books published since the beginning of this Century gives a feel of how there is a sense of mistrust and a cloud of wariness towards the object "democracy": the controversial and

famous book by C. Crouch *On Coping with "Post Democracy"* (2001) to the more recent one by J.-W. Müller *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (2011) and, in the case of Italian publications, the one by the political scholar A. Mastropaolo *La democrazia è una causa persa?* (2011).

Rosanvallon is amongst the many that legitimately moves criticisms against the transformations which have affected democratic western societies in recent decades. His analyses are broad on a historical-descriptive level as much as on a suggestive one, therefore this contribution of mine will focus on some theoretical key aspects which are inspired by his latest publication, but also, when required, contextualising the latter on the trail of his previous works.

The core thesis of *Le Bon Gouvernement* is that democracy's recent history is constantly affected by the dynamics of growth of the executive powers. If the affirmation of the democratic utopia was the result of the need to allow sovereignty to the people, and therefore legislative (parliamentary) power as the most suitable instrument for the purpose, contemporary democratic societies' histories instead are characterised by a slow, but inexorable, growth of executive powers. This represents a *de facto* betrayal of the great dream of the American and French Revolutions.<sup>1</sup>

Several reasons can be identified to understand this *changement de paradigme* from an historical and conceptual point of view and these are examined in depth by Rosanvallon in his book.

I will attempt a dialogue with the author on three aspects of his analysis, which I believe play an important role when reflecting on the future of democracy: 1) the democratic ethos 2)

<sup>1</sup> P. Rosanvallon, *Le bon gouvernement* (Éditions du Seuil 2015), p. 16.

the relationship between economic globalisation and the crisis of democracy 3) the role of the new media.

## I

### The democratic Ethos

From Rosanvallon's earlier studies, it is clear that his main aim is to rethink the relationship between Democracy and Socialism. He writes in his introduction to *La société des égaux* «l'avenir de l'idée socialiste au XXI siècle se jouera autour de cet approfondissement sociétal de l'idéal».<sup>2</sup>

If I understand well, the author's aim is to give new foundations to a project of democratic society able to overcome pathological aspects of what can be labelled as "liberal" vision of democracy.

In synthesis, the liberals would be content to assert that "democratic" societies are those in which citizens choose their own representatives by means of free elections. For this view, Rosanvallon uses the expression *démocratie d'autorisation*: to his view, the main limitation of a society conceived in such a way is that it is left frail and subject to the centralization dynamics of growth of the executive power as *de facto* occurred over the course of the 1900s.

The premise of *Le Bon Gouvernement* is that, for about three decades, the *présidentialisation* movement, which resulted from the strengthening process of the executive powers, has also characterised the development of contemporary democracies. Substantially this *présidentialisation* process has led to the

<sup>2</sup> P. Rosanvallon, *La société des égaux* (Éditions du Seuil 2011), p. 23

pathological transformation of democracy in a simple *procedure d'autorisation*.<sup>3</sup>

In the Author's diagnosis, contemporary democratic societies seem to have lost the holistic vision with a common *ethos* and the relation of trust (*confiance*) between the rulers and the ruled. It becomes clear that in order to renew the democratic project it is necessary that the citizens stop being mere "spectators" and return to being protagonists of the political life of society. Using the Author's words, it is a matter of «définir le conditions d'une démocratisation de la nouvelle forme présidentielle-gouvernante du régime démocratique»<sup>4</sup> in order to avoid its drifting.

Once the difference is established between rulers and ruled, which has been justly stressed by the theorists of the élites,<sup>5</sup> the scope is to reflect on how to avoid this necessarily asymmetric relation becoming a pathological aspect of democracy, where domination forms against the citizens find place whilst being incompatible with the authentic democratic spirit which has characterised modernity.<sup>6</sup>

Rosanvallon's proposals contextually encompass both the rulers as much as the ruled.

In relation to the former, he clarifies first that being "democratically elected" is not a sufficient requirement, unless associated with "democratic ruling". Rosanvallon points out some specific qualities that rulers need to possess in order to regain the now lost trust-relationship with the ruled ones. To reach this objective, meaning to allow the government to be

<sup>3</sup> Id., *Le bon gouvernement*, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 208-209.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 208-212.

recognised as “democratic”, it is necessary that this is exercised in respect to three qualities: legibility (*lisibilité*), responsibility (*responsabilité*) and the reactivity (*réactivité*):<sup>7</sup> Only when the government makes clear its own lines of action, only when it is subject to scrutiny and accountable for its decisions and, lastly, only when it is committed to answer to “questioning” from the bottom, this qualifies it as “democratic”.

Forgetting these qualities has meant that the executive power, in the so-called democratic societies, has defaulted into a bad-governing regime (*mal-gouvernement*) and a bad representation (*mal-représentation*).<sup>8</sup>

In the third part of *Le Bon Gouvernement*, Rosanvallon looks at the role of the ruled ones, dealing with the possible ways to re-activate citizen’s participation in the government of a city with the scope to gain back the relationship of trust between themselves and the rulers. In particular, he refers to the introduction of “new democratic organizations” to facilitate the migration from a *démocratie d’autorisation* to a *démocratie d’exercice*. The Author indicates three of these: the *Conseil du fonctionnement démocratique* (CFD), the *commissions publiques* (CP) and the *organisations de vigilance citoyenne* (OVG).<sup>9</sup>

The CFD would monitor the transparency and the integrity of the rulers; the CP would monitor the quality standard of the public policies and the administration powers; lastly, the OVG would have the double role of supervising the

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297. It is interesting that Rosanvallon explains the recent populist movement phenomenon as a consequence of this crisis of “trust” in Europe which characterises nowadays representative democracies (*ibid.*, p. 385).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 385.

“reactivity” of the rulers and to organise ways to secure education and information of its citizens.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to stress that, aside from individual historic reconstructions and theoretical solutions proposed, for the Author the general scheme of reconstruction of democracy passes by a strong reference to the idea of “commonality” intended in a “formal” way (as equality of all in front of the law), but mostly in a “substantial” way, in the sense of a possibility to be incisive in the management of the public interest.

This is the reason that suggested me to title this paragraph “Democratic Ethos”: for Rosanvallon the presence of a bunch of mere electoral procedures does not represent “proof” of the existence of an authentic democracy; instead, what is necessary is the existence of an internal “tension” aimed at overcoming the obstacles to the accomplishment of a true “commonality”.<sup>11</sup>

At this stage, I would like to present some brief considerations on the issue of the democratic *ethos*, because in my view the “commonality” presented by Rosanvallon is not a target which can be achieved only by a greater involvement of the citizens, although this remains an important element upon which reflect.

To give life to a *démocratie d'exercice* which is characterised by a genuine relationship of trust between the rulers and the ruled (where this trust is without doubt an essential component of a

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 384 ss.

<sup>11</sup> «Cela implique de penser la démocratie à partir des problèmes de sa mise en oeuvre et des risques permanents de la voir se dégrader en gouvernement oligarchique. C'est-à-dire de l'appréhender comme un travail sur elle-même, liant le débat sur ses conditions de fonctionnement à l'appréhension des conditions de production d'une communalité plus forte. Ce à quoi renvoie la notion même de démocratie d'exercice dont la mise en oeuvre constitue pour cela le couer de la nouvelle révolution démocratique à accomplir» (*ibid.*, p. 392).



true democratic *ethos*) Rosanvallon clarifies that those who are elected must effectively pursue the “common good” or in other words, that the citizens have the perception that who rules has a “dévouement au bien commun”.<sup>12</sup>

It seems to me that this is one of the main problems of our democracies: the strong pluralism characterising our societies, in fact, makes the concept of “common good” a difficult entity to define beforehand. In reality, here two separate strands become intertwined: the first being the commitment to “dedication” to the common good, intended as the will of the elected ones not to work to take personal advantage, no matter if this is done lawfully using loopholes or illegally; the second instead is the interpretation of the “common good” in terms of content.

Only if we step up the discourse onto this new level do we perceive the difference between “liberal” conceptions of democracy on one side, and its “socialist” conceptions (namely some forms of republicanism) on the other.

If the concept of democracy, as recognised by Rosanvallon, is an undetermined<sup>13</sup> one, and as a such it requires a serious and long reflection process, it is just as reasonable to assert that the same intensity of efforts are to be dedicated to the concept of “common good”. In both cases we deal with *contested concepts*, which means that they have two closely intertwined dimensions, one descriptive and one normative; this, resulting in the complex, if not impossible, task of gaining a neutral point of view towards the two aspects in question.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

<sup>14</sup> Q. Skinner, *Visions of Politics. Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001).

Today, a substantial part of the conflicts within democratic societies concern bioethics or rights recognition for specific communities or groups: for instance, I am referring to the surrogate uterus, to the stepchild adoption, to the family arrangements as much as conscientious objector medics who work in state hospital infrastructures...

These issues represent some of the main clashing topics in our societies as a direct consequence of the different interpretations of what “common good” is. I agree with Rosanvallon about the need for claiming greater participation from the citizens; or for underlining the need of a relation of trust between rulers and ruled. I am not so sure that ultimately this could be so decisive to solve the delicate questions I referred to earlier, and which represent a central aspect of the life of the citizens in democratic societies.

I have raised this issue because in my opinion Jürgen Habermas has had the right intuition when he stated that the existence of a truly democratic society «depends on the motivation of a population *accustomed to liberty*, motivation that cannot be generated by administrative measures».<sup>15</sup> This means, as demonstrated by Habermas’ recent work,<sup>16</sup> that one of the most pressing questions of today is the one related to the

<sup>15</sup> J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms. Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Mit Press 1996) p. 461.

<sup>16</sup> Recently Habermas has focused his interest to the relationship politics-religion in order to overcome the limitations of the secular philosophical approach. In his opinion, while the latter is unable to adequately guarantee the basis for the “social solidarity”, the great religious traditions, which have begun a dialog process with modernity, can become important agents for the defense of this fundamental value that is necessary to contrast the excesses of the neoliberal paradigm: J. Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays* (Polity Press 2008).

background values of our society, particularly, in an era characterised by a scientific nihilism on one side and by a neo-liberalism on the other.

The key point onto which is important to reflect is that the democratic principle itself, which is the search for the consent or the active participation by the citizens, does not always guarantee the spread of democratic values in a society or the natural development of a democracy following the fall of a dictatorial regime. I will provide two examples to clarify this point.

The first relates to what has happened during the so-called “Arab Springs”, in particular in the case of the Egypt. Following the fall of the dictator Mubarak, the first democratic elections in the spring of 2012 resulted in the rise to power of the Muslim Brotherhood, who have started a process of Islamization of the Egyptian society, interrupted then by the coup of the General Al-Sisi.

A second example instead is that of the death penalty, a pressing debate in modern and contemporary democratic history. In a stimulating study, the US sociologist of law David Garland has shown how the issue of the permanence of the death penalty in many US states depends on a calculated strategy by the political candidates: given that often the majority of the electorate is in favour of the death penalty, the candidates prefer not to deal with the subject for fear to impact their consent in the voting polls. Paradoxically, often it has happened that the abolition of the death penalty has occurred by “chance”. This is the case of the state of Michigan, where reformist elites once raised to power

in 1846, repealed this institution (with reference to common crimes) with a sort of coup and against the people's will.<sup>17</sup>

These two examples are useful to understand how in the realization of a Democracy, the Democratic Principle represents a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one. This needs to be joined to liberal principles in order for it to play a positive role in the safeguarding of democratic values, or in the case of the construction of a democratic society after a dictatorship, with the scope to prevent illiberal movements, or fundamentalist ones, from taking power even by means of free elections.

These short considerations allow me to develop a second discourse referring to the dynamics of executive power's strengthening as envisaged by Rosanvallon.

My fear is that, in his rich and profound reconstruction, these dynamics risk becoming a sort of "autonomous variable" in the history of contemporary societies. I say this because in various places the Author aims at linking it to phenomena like caesarism, totalitarianism and populism which would have in common the «même prétension à dépasser les limites de l'élection et à mettre en place une forme, considérée par eux radicalement démocratique, de personnalisation du pouvoir».<sup>18</sup>

Of course, the phenomena of personalization of power is a real problem but in order to full understand the XX century totalitarian systems, as well as South American and European populisms, I prefer to underline other common elements: I refer to a Manichean vision of reality, a narrative based on a

<sup>17</sup> D. Garland, *Peculiar Institution: America's Death Penalty in an Age of Abolition* (Harvard University Press 2010).

<sup>18</sup> P. Rosanvallon, *Le bon gouvernement*, p. 320.

philosophy of history, and a general rejection of capitalism and liberal values.

If we observe reality through the latter interpretative grid, it seems to me that some of the most recent political experiences cited by Rosanvallon can be interpreted in a different way. It should not be forgotten, for instance, what lately is happening in Turkey: the current authoritarian turn depends significantly on a certain Theocratic tendency that is historically present in that geographic/cultural area, and which is aimed to scale back the secular achievements started with Atatürk. Maybe, what is happening in Turkey becomes more comprehensible by reflecting on the classic question of the relationship between religion and politics in the Islamic world, rather than considering the illiberal results of the current Turkish regime as a logical consequence of a general dynamics of reinforcement of the executive power.<sup>19</sup> On the contrary, the latter could be mistaken as a sort of autonomous variable from the context into which it develops.<sup>20</sup> In the case of Turkey, as well as in other contexts, the difficulties of their “Democracies” are not the primary result of the reinforcement of the executive powers, but rather the consequence of factors related to their own circumstances. For this reason, in the next paragraph I would like to discuss the relationship between the economic globalization and the crisis of Democracy.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>20</sup> On the other side, Rosanvallon himself admits that in the French case the risk of an illiberal drift has been only a potential one, as it remains a State of law. The Author finds, on the contrary, an illiberal tendency “effective” in regimes like the ones of Putin or Erdogan (*ibid.*, p. 166). However, if we accept my interpretative grid, then the strengthening of the executive power is understandable, in some contexts, as an “effect” or as “instrument” of the betrayal of the democratic ideals rather than as “the main cause of” democracies’ pathology.

## II

### Relationship Between the Economic Globalization and the Crisis of Democracy

The proposals discussed in *Le Bon Gouvernement* fit into—or at least this is my interpretation—the process of re-nationalization of Democracy hoped for by Rosanvallon in the last part of *La société des égaux*<sup>21</sup> where multiplying citizens' occasions for participation in the political life and the control of the executive power are for the author the best way for the «réalisation d'une société des égaux».<sup>22</sup>

There is an aspect to which Rosanvallon briefly refers which, if examined in depth, could offer an enhanced understanding of the transformations of contemporary democracies; this is the relationship between economic globalization and the crisis of democracy. The author is doubtlessly conscious of the influence that the globalization process has had on the strengthening of the executive powers. However, my feeling is that such influence, in his analysis, does not have a pivotal role, which instead I consider essential in the understanding of the “crisis” of the democratic societies, particularly in Europe.

I would like to try to sustain this thesis by recalling the interesting theory of the economist Dani Rodrik. In his book: *The Globalization Paradox. Why Global Markets, States and Democracy can't coexist*, Rodrik represents how it is necessary to reflect on the relationship between capitalism and democracy by re-thinking the economic-political model which has characterised the second half of XX century.

<sup>21</sup> P. Rosanvallon, *La société des égaux*, p. 411.

<sup>22</sup> Id., *Le bon gouvernement*, p. 392.

Today, according to his view, the world states would be in front of a triple lock to untie if they want to harmonize the global markets and the democratic institutions.

This is because there are three main interests on the table: *Hyper-Globalization*, *National Sovereignty* and *Democratic Politics*.

Currently for Rodrik it is not possible to simultaneously grant the interests of each of these parties: opting for *Hyper-Globalization* and *National sovereignty* would go against the democratic *policies*, given that the existence of a State would require a deficit of Democracy in order to survive the globalised competition (as it currently happens in the case of EU). The second option is to prioritize *Hyper-Globalization* and *Democratic Politics* with the consequence of undermining *National Sovereignty*. Like the previous, this second alternative would be impassable, as the end of the National States would require the formation of a Super World State. Currently, this is inconceivable due to enormous socio-cultural global differences.

The only realistically pursuable option is to re-think *Hyper-Globalization* (not globalization!) in a way that would safeguard the *National Sovereignty* of the National States and the possibility of *Democratic Politics*. This can only be reached via drawing up new international agreements aimed at avoiding the same excesses, which have characterised the financial capitalistic approach of the last thirty years.<sup>23</sup>

As I outlined earlier, my conviction is that Rodrick's triple lock is helpful for a general thought on the crisis of western democracies, particularly in Europe. Without doubt, as

<sup>23</sup> D. Rodrik, *The Globalization Paradox. Why Global Markets, States and Democracy Can't Coexist* (Norton & Company 2011).

emphasized by Rosanvallon, in recent decades there has been a process of strengthening of the executive power resulting in the weakening of the legislative one.

However, if Rodrick's thesis is correct, one could wonder if attempting to allow the citizens greater involvement in the administration of the power could not risk proving insufficient, or worse detrimental, particularly if this attempt at involvement should precede the solution of the issues with *Hyper-Globalization*?<sup>24</sup>

### III

#### **The role of the Media**

A typical aspect of today's democracies is the feeling of general mistrust towards the political class, as demonstrated by the election turnout results which at times can be very poor.

This is a point on which Rosanvallon insists recalling the need to re-establish a trust relationship between the rulers and the ruled. To reach this aim, it is necessary to work on both sides: the elected and the electors. Some instruments are known and available. For instance, I am referring to systems of control of the executive power's policies or of the local administrators via institutions like the *recall*, in use in the Anglo-Saxon world, which Rosanvallon also makes reference to.

<sup>24</sup> As previously said, not always the "choices" of the citizens appear as the "best ones". For instance we can think to the recent referendum on the Brexit. Even in the presence of "adequately informed citizens", like in the model of deliberative democracy, one cannot be sure that the "choices" made or majority orientations will always be "preferable". To sustain the opposite, would mean to deny pluralism.



There is an element, which the author briefly mentions, and which I would like to expand upon a little, that is the role of the new media in contemporary society.

One of the functions of the great parties throughout the XX Century has been to function as a conveyor belt between the citizen and the world. The great ideologies of modernity were the answer to this need for orientation within the public debate.

Today, the predominant function of the Internet in the circulation and spreading of ideas has had a final role in the crisis of traditional parties' ideologies, because the citizens can directly access the information they require.

The opportunities offered by the web are undeniable. However, there are already many studies which look at the not always positive role covered by the new media in the construction of an authentic democratic *ethos*.

I am referring, for example, to those from the American scholar Cass Sunstein who has shown how, paradoxically, the Web democratization of information presents side effects for society. Sunstein's thesis is very clear: often, the internet search is unconsciously aimed at finding a confirmation to one's ideas, rather than to their denial. The short term result of this being the reinforcement of one's prejudices rather than the enhancement of one's critical-dialogical ability, which is the necessary condition to create an authentic democratic *ethos*. Whilst the face to face dialogue *imposes* us, as citizens, to argue and face-off different positions from ours, the browsing of the Web carries a serious risk: that of freeing ourselves from this "cognitive weight". The main result of this been the process of radicalization of political

beliefs, ultimately leading to the increase of social conflicts rather than their mitigation.<sup>25</sup>

It is not coincidental that many populist movements rely on the potential of the Web to find consensus and to develop programming platforms. This is particularly clear in Italy with the *5 Stars Movement* that tends to use a simplistic and captivating language, often of Manichean style, which obstructs a real critical confrontation.

Furthermore, as it is known, the Web is the ideal place for the proliferation of conspiracy theories of all sorts, which are aimed at undermining the trustworthiness of the State and the institutions. Still in relation to Italian affairs, I want to recall a recent example concerning the medical vaccines.

Although one of the positive aspects of modernity is the advance of scientific progress, particularly in the field of medicine, for a while now the Web has been the battlefield of a media campaign aimed at discrediting official medicine, in particular in relation to vaccinations. In some Italian regions, this campaign of misinformation has contributed to generate a fresh outbreak of potentially lethal illnesses, especially for the youngest, so as to require an urgent and firm intervention from the Italian government.

I have presented this example as it seems to me that it is particularly supportive of Sunstein's theories on the potential dangers that new media could represent for our democracies. In my opinion, this is one of the crossroads on which the future of the democratic societies will be played: sooner or later there will

<sup>25</sup> C. Sunstein, *#Republic. Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Princeton University Press 2017).

be the need for a sort of regulation without, of course, beginning any form of Web censorship.

I would like to add that a recent work of the Byelorussian Evgenij Mozorov shows how a number of values so dear to the World Wide Web are at risk of causing a backlash for the democratic societies, particularly in relation to the rulers/ruled pair.

For instance, if the value of transparency is given absolute priority, a potentially perverse consequence might arise in the process of legislating: politicians, aware of being constantly monitored by the citizens, might be too conditioned to the point of avoid going against the grain of the public opinion, for fear to loose consensus in subsequent polls. In other words, considering transparency as the paramount value could risk compromising other fundamental values in the democratic process. What Mozorov argues is that making transparency the main value and, consequently, diminishing the rulers' full autonomy would put at risk the quality of the legislative production rather than guaranteeing, *a priori*, its automatic enhancement.<sup>26</sup>

## IV Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that it is important to go back to the issue of the values. If, as I mentioned earlier, our societies are characterised by a plurality of values which is now stronger than ever, than the issue is to find shared “narratives” which are

<sup>26</sup> E. Mozorov, *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism* (The Perseus Books Group 2014).

necessary (as correctly underlined by Rosanvallon) to reconstitute a positive relationship with the future.<sup>27</sup>

At this moment, my personal feeling is that the crisis of democracy depends upon the absence of such an element, which is the lack of a shared “narrative” able to sustain a democratic *ethos* in western societies. The absence of this “narrative” is a problem that relates to different levels of contemporary politics, from the national one to the supranational one as it is plainly evident in the case of the EU.

The elements to which I have referred, which are the crisis of political parties, the negative effects of a certain way of interpreting globalization and the crucial role of the new media, have undoubtedly a fundamental role in the crisis of the “narrative” that until yesterday was in the background of the democratic project.

Of course I can’t argue this point with sufficient adequacy, but my feeling is that the democratic project has been constructed on a patrimony of Christian and Enlightened ideals: therefore, many aspects of the current crisis are the result of the collapse of these ideals in the democratic citizen’s imaginary.

For this reason, I believe that for *retrouver un rapport positif à l’avenir*, as hoped for by Rosanvallon, a cultural reflection is the “fundamental requirement” to safeguard the democratic project in its deepest sense: to protect all human beings’ dignity.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, all the proposals aimed at increasing the participation of citizens in the life of a democratic society, or in

<sup>27</sup> P. Rosanvallon, *Le bon gouvernement*, pp. 391-392.

<sup>28</sup> H. Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person: A New Genealogy of Human Rights* (Georgetown University Press 2012).

empowering the responsibility of those who are in charge, have to be considered with great interest. This is because they represent the only way to ensure the sacred value of pluralism, which instead is undermined by the cluster of Manichean, populist and anti-liberal political conceptions, which today are particularly aggressive.

For this reason, Rosanvallon's book, beyond specific aspects onto which it is possible to differ, represents a precious instrument for reflection on how to allow the citizen into the centre of life in a democratic society.

*Università di Palermo*