Liberalism and Democracy by Norberto Bobbio

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tive forms. She also ignores the fact that his later works abound in the pathetic fallacy, engulfing and obscuring external reality in personal emotion. This imbalance is evident in some of Ruskin's sketches of the 1870s, which Corradini mentions in passing. She explains Ruskin's etymologizing and its contemporary analogues, but apparently accepts his assumption that words have natural origins and that a word's "original" meaning is the true one. Her analysis might have benefited from Derrida's "White Mythology", among other works. While Corradini notes that Ruskin's ideal of adjectival accuracy influenced the Decadents, who abandoned his moralism, she might have mentioned that his aesthetic, combining dynamism and stasis, anticipates Vorticism. Ezra Pound shares Ruskin's desire to harmonize fact and insight and to promote international literary standards through close reading.

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**Liberalism and Democracy**

By Norberto Bobbio.

Though Bobbio says that "liberalism and democracy have never been radically antithetical" (73), the bulk of this text, rightly concerns the border warfare that has raged and ever will rage between the partisans of the individual (liberals) and those of society (democrats). Beginning in the ancient world where individual rights were essentially unknown, Bobbio traces, in a bare ninety pages and seventeen chapters, the encounters of society with those who defend the right of the individual against the weight of society. His text covers, among other things, Hobbes, Locke, and natural rights theory, Kant's hostility to state paternalism, the uneasiness of Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill about the tyranny of the majority, the complications arising out of the encounter of socialism and democracy, as well as the problems raised by the appearance of the popular and democratic authoritarian state.

The modern version of the conflict between the individual (liberalism) and society (democracy) may be seen in the impossibility of reconciling the contradictory ideals displayed in the 1789 political slogan: liberté, égalité, and fraternité. The problem of reconciling liberty—with its inherent recognition of the right of each person to rise to his/her own chosen level (and equality) with its demand that before the race begins, everyone must be brought to the same level—is the prime meridian across which stare Rousseau, Mazzini, socialism and other leveling forces on the one side, and Montesquieu, Cavour, de Tocqueville, and defenders of the individual on the other. How could one ever come to an agreement that everything practical had been done for equality and that the starting pistol could then be fired? Worse, how could one ever come to an agreement that everything had been done to
bring the many to the starting gate, if some still persisted in choosing ludi-
crous life goals: mere wealth for one and going on the bum for another?

But the struggle between the liberal and the democrat was not always
over economics. It can be traced back to the determination to stand out
from the crowd, the moral right to be
different that is symbolized in the clash of Socrates and Athens. As
noted by de Tocqueville, and later, Weber, Kafka, and perhaps Foucault,
the question was and still remains:
will the demos—because of its size
and its suspicion of inequality, differ-
ence, and quality—overwhelm liber-
ty with its suspicion of the many, of
homogeneity, and the organizational
man. The liberal asks: “Will the world
be so homogenized by the time the
race starts that no one will be inter-
est in, or have the moral resources
to be, different?” The democrat asks:
“Do the community and its traditions
not have some rights against the odd,
disruptive, menacing—and unan-
swerable—‘why’ of the pest and the
eccentric?”

In this sense, the conflict pits the
democrat’s faith that the many can be
brought to share the interests of the
few against the liberal’s suspicion
that a state capable of such an
achievement could only be an Ethical
State like that of Gentile. In nine-
teenth-century Italy, this debate
between liberalism and democracy
was played out, as Bobbio notes, in
the struggle between the ideals of
Cavour on the one hand and Mazzini
on the other. For the liberal Cavour,
the question was primarily one of
limiting the state and defending the
right of the individual to pursue

interests outside the state, which the
majority might find objectionable.
For the republican Mazzini, the issue
was how the educational role of the
state to shape its citizens could be
fulfilled by a minimalist state. As
Bobbio notes, the issue became a
drama in real life when Mazzini
seized power in Rome in 1848 and
had to confront the liberal French
Foreign Minister, de Tocqueville,
whose hostility “sealed the fate of the
Roman republic” (71).

Though Bobbio does not note it, it
was this same confrontation between
liberalism and democracy that was to
plague the Italian state right into the
Giolittian period and beyond. Indeed,
the question became all the
more complicated when Giolitti, the
heir of Cavour’s liberal state, found
that he had to defend liberty and its
merely procedural rules against a
majority hostile to liberty and con-
trolled by the Black International or
the Red. How does one play by the
rules and defend liberty against
an illiberal population? It is a question
one suspects President Yeltsin will
soon have to answer again.

Since the rise of socialism,
Marxism, and other mass political
movements, but especially since the
industrial revolution transformed the
globe, the debate between liberalism
and democracy has tended (recently
in the works of Hayek and Nozick,
for example) to center on a defense
of the minimal state to protect econom-
ic, property, and acquisitive rights
of the few. In other words, the conflict
between the one and the few against
the many has lost its Socratic flavor
and has focused on the right of the
few to consume. The question that
Bobbio raises—and as he notes, it was a question raised earlier in the debate between Einaudi and Croce—is to what extent is this economic right essential to the moral right of liberalism's defense against democracy? This is no easy question: If a person has decided that wealth is the good that he or she above all else wishes to pursue, what moral right does the puritan have to say this is wrong? Inasmuch as the many poor will always resent the few that are rich, how is one to distinguish legitimate moral resentment from the Nietzschean ressentiment of the low-minded?

This dilemma is only apparently made easier by the fact that today wealth is as powerful a threat to liberty as the masses ever were; for today wealth can pave the globe, buy elections, or procure nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons for entire nations of fundamentalist kamikazes. In such a world, it becomes plain that liberalism and democracy require regulation. But by whom?

Bobbio's answer is that the two regimes—liberalism and democracy—must learn to accommodate each other and become tense allies. To such a complex question, one should not expect an answer any more definite, though one wishes Bobbio had spent more time on the necessity of the debate between liberalism and democracy rather than on explaining the various forms of that debate. After all, what will the world's fate be if ever an evil, hypnotic, and wealthy liberal does wed the elusive demos? To put the issue in classical terms, liberty requires both Socrates and Aristophanes, the philosopher and the city. For only by recognizing that theory and practice, philosophy and rhetoric each have their claims and that liberty cannot survive the domination of either one or the other, can we understand the importance of the dialogue and the conflict between liberalism and democracy.

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Il Sublime: Teorie estetiche nell'Inghilterra del Settecento
By Samuel H. Monk.
Translated by Rachele Garattini.
Introduction by Giuseppe Sertoli.

Samuel Holt Monk (1902-1981) published The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England in 1935 when interest in the subject was at its lowest ebb in two hundred years. Academic scholarship paid little attention to the sublime, and no modern school of poetry or criticism had found any use for it. Nor did Monk succeed in resuscitating the concept, though when a revival did happen—in the 1960s—his study was republished and honored as a trailblazer. This Italian translation of a classic work in the "history of ideas" is a testimony to its continuing value.

Monk's special virtue was to trace the concept of the Longinian sublime from its humble beginnings as a side issue in neoclassicism to its thunder-