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Giovanni Orsini

Politics and the Individual in the Twentieth Century

Summary:

The liberal state, writes the jurist Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, is nourished by presuppositions that it cannot itself guarantee: it functions if it is inhabited by individuals of a certain “moral substance”, but is unable to construct them. Freud’s essay on group psychology and the analysis of the ego is at the root of that contradiction. It is not by chance that it was published right after the Great War and at the beginning of two decades that saw liberalism touch its nadir, and dialogues with a literature that had anticipated the illiberal catastrophes of the “Thirty Years War”. Giovanni Orsina’s seminar will present some historical considerations on the twentieth-century avatars of Böckenförde’s paradox: on the difficulties that liberal democracy had to face when it began to look inside the “black box” of the individual, and on how it solved them (or failed to solve them) in the hundred years that separate us from Freud’s essay.

Giovanni Orsina is Professor of Contemporary History and Director of the School of Government at Luiss-Guido Carli University in Rome. He taught at the Universities of Bologna, L’Aquila and La Sapienza, University of Rome. He was also a visiting scholar at the University of Oxford, Sciences Po Paris, and the ENS Cachan. He is a founding member and vice-president of the Association for Political History. He is the author of five monographs and about fifty essays and edited thirteen volumes and monographic issues of journals on twentieth-century European politics, published in Italian, English, French, German and Spanish. He is an editor for the Turin newspaper “La Stampa”. He regularly comments on Italian and European politics for a wide range of media – he has been interviewed by the BBC, CNN, Bloomberg News, Al Jazeera International, The Financial Times, The Guardian, The Economist, Le Figaro, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, El Mundo, El Pais, Yomiuri Shimbun, among others.

Among his latest publications: *The Democracy of Narcissism. A brief history of anti-politics* (2018); *Il berlusconismo nella storia d’Italia* (2013; English translation 2014; French translation 2018); *Political Enemies in Republican Italy* (2017, with Marco Gervasoni); *European Political Cultures and the European Integration Process* (2015, with Lucia Bonfreschi and Antonio Varsori).