

Comments on the Technoprogessive Declaration
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I must admit that I am not very comfortable with the techno-progressive declaration.

I have always been very skeptical about political entrepreneurship of scientists, for I cherish the specificity of their work as much as I do with that of politicians. Somehow, they both share the power of soliciting human imagination over some representation of reality, hence possibly the power of mobilizing masses: politically, by projecting individual preferences into some common will; scientifically, by projecting present situations into new futures. Now, the two types of projections are part of the same story, that of the future, but most of the time their connection does not receive the deserved attention. Indeed, such connection rests on the delicate relationship between two powers of imagination and my understanding of the techno-progressive declaration is that such delicate relationship has been dismissed once more.

The two powers of imagination should remain well distinct and any situation in which one takes over the other should be regarded with caution. Otherwise the risk is that imagination, whatever its sources might be, tacitly becomes dogmatic and constitutive of a non-debated reality. This is what happens, for instance, when a void of representation exists in politics, a void through which scientific entrepreneurship may easily paved its own way.

This situation is not uncommon in our—at least western—society, where politics seems to have abjured its double performative character of producing some *representation* of the future and being *representative* of specific societal values (for the double character of representation see Bruno Latour, 2004). Without such representation individuals cannot participate in such political, collective performance, i.e. be part of it. This is the first part of the problem, which strictly regards the delicate operation of representing some reality and setting the rules for participating in it.

The second part of the problem relates to the possibility of changing the rules of participation, which has directly to do with the capacity to judge and contest them. Indeed, the political incapacity to create meaningful and realistic representations of the future has its counterpart in depriving people from their right to judge and contest such representation. Borrowing from Nadia Urbinati's theory of democratic representation as diarchy of will and judgment, the situation just described corresponds to one in which the democratic engine of debate and rupture has somehow stopped working.

To be sure, it would be naïve to minimize the difficulty of representing the future, which is indeed a very difficult operation, at least as complex as our society may inspire. Conversely, the inability to issue judgments on the future is connected to the lack of tangible tests of existence. In such context, science and technological progress have certainly a role to play, but this has proved to ambiguously exacerbate the problem while trying to fix it. On the one hand, science has generally tried to serve policymaking by anticipating the future, that is, by stabilizing the axiological, epistemological and ontological dimensions of it (Chateauraynaud 2013). The recurrent advocacy for

evidence-based policy is the supreme example of such tendency, where projected policy can be validated as rational only to the extent that they can be referred to some scientific counterfactual, no matter how far the future pushes such counterfactual to be lost in time—and imagination. On the other hand, the acceleration of scientific and technological innovation has produced exactly an opposite situation to stabilization: due to the accelerated technological power of combining the three cited dimensions into virtually infinite number of plausible sets, the human capacity to discriminate among scientific representations becomes severely reduced. Humanly speaking, a tacit societal illusion seems to be now established that we live in a world of proliferating options where we can control them all; most tragically, the illusion pertains to the idea that we can individually control them all.

Scientific progress cannot substitute nor patronize collective thinking. Differently, it can reactivate the democratic engine of debate by reinserting imagination as meaningful act of political and participatory discussion about the future. I do not see any other role for a true democratic science and a true technological progress that one contributing to a process of intersubjective reconnection, where imaginaries and projections of science and policy can be discussed rather than superimposed on each other.

Therefore, I cannot subscribe to the techno-progressive declaration for my sense is that of a futuristic flavor disappointingly close to the unfortunate fascist inclination to power exultation, as it was for the Italian experience. Some more poetry is wishfully to be allied to such futuristic propensity, such as in the Russian tradition where the disclosure of uncomfortable weaknesses—rather than euphoric power—was all but incompatible with a revolutionary vision to human sympathy (for a good introduction on the two traditions, see Franco Berardi 2011).

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