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The Will of the People

A Modern Myth

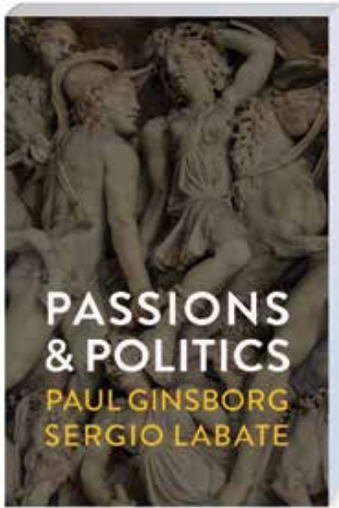
ALBERT WEALE

Democracies today are in the grip of a myth: the will of the people.

In this book, Albert Weale dissects the idea of the will of the people, showing that it relies on a mythical view of participatory democracy. The definition of "the people" is vague and shifting. As soon as a choice between more than two simple alternatives is involved, there is often no clear answer to the question of what a majority favors. Worst of all, because governments have to interpret the results of referendums, the will of the people becomes a means for strengthening executive control – the exact opposite of what appealing to the people's will seemed to imply.

Weale argues that it's time to dispense with the myth of the will of the people. A flourishing democracy requires an open society in which choices can be challenged, parliaments strengthened and populist leaders called to account.

ALBERT WEALE is Emeritus Professor of Political Theory and Public Policy at University College London and Fellow of the British Academy.



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Passions and Politics

PAUL GINSBORG & SERGIO LABATE

Translated by David Broder

The dominant model of democratic politics emphasizes reason at the expense of the passions. Passions have been treated as dangerous, the opposite of reason and virtue. In this short book Paul Ginsborg and Sergio Labate challenge this model and put forward a very different view, developing an account of modern democratic politics in which both passions and reason play a crucial role. This focus on the passions enables us to understand why neoliberalism has become the most successful ideology of our times: it has incorporated its own romantic and individualist version of the passions into its worldview, seducing individuals by the allure of consumption.

At a time when populist leaders are on the ascendancy and political processes are shaped as much by anger, resentment and fear as they are by reason and argument, this refocusing of political analysis on the role of the passions could not be more timely.

PAUL GINSBORG is Professor of Contemporary European History at the University of Florence, Italy.

SERGIO LABATE is Professor of Theoretical Philosophy at University of Macerata, Italy.