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A Discreet Star? Remarks on Giovanni Sartori's Lack of Visibility in France

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Abstract

Whereas Giovanni Sartori was a founding father of Italian political science and a figure of international stature in the English-speaking world, he did not, however, enjoy comparable visibility within French political science. On the occasion of a special journal issue devoted to him, the article offers an analysis of the reasons that render this situation intelligible. These include, in the postwar period, cultural factors; considerations relating to the differing pace at which the discipline became institutionalised in France and in Italy; and the specific orientations adopted by Sartori, who, by privileging te influence of American scholarship, rejecting proximity with sociology, and producing a body of work marked by his liberal-conservative political preferences, pursued a path opposed to that which would gradually come to characterise the dominant orientation of French political science. The article concludes with brief remarks on the difficulties that the forthcoming translation of a major text by Sartori on comparative politics may, or may not, present.

1. Introduction

The recent academic events revisiting the figure of Giovanni Sartori, on the occasion of the centenary of his birth in 2024, provide an opportunity to reconsider his work and appreciate his impact. Given the pivotal role Sartori played in Italian political science (e.g. Pasquino, 2005), nobody really claims to present a fundamentally new perspective on the contributions of this prolific author. These commemorations, which have been published also in English over the years (e.g. Collier & Gerring, 2009; Banckowicz, M. & Kubát, 2025), show that Sartori is a major figure in international political science. Following a decisive academic stay in New York in 1949, he began to publish in English from the late 1950s. He became active in transnational networks (such as the Committee on Political Sociology within the International Sociological Association) and left Italy to pursue most of the second half of his career in the United States (at Stanford and then Columbia) from the 1970s to the early 1990s. Sartori was, thus, a transatlantic Italian scholar whose reputation became global.

Sartori's aura – obvious in Italy, tangible in the United States (at least for a certain generation of scholars), and pronounced in some linguistic contexts (in the Spanish-speaking world for instance) – does not, however, shine with equal intensity everywhere. The present article seizes the opportunity offered by a forthcoming special issue devoted to Sartori, of a leading French-language political science journal – the *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée* (*RIPC*) – and aims to illustrate this through the case of

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France[1], where there is a community of political scientists broadly comparable in size and degree of professionalisation (Smith, 2020) to that found in Italy.[2] In France, Sartori's work, while not wholly disregarded, is accorded a relatively modest level of visibility, as seems to have occurred in other countries in Northern Europe. The present article commences with that essentially impressionistic evaluation by an informed observer rather than a detailed bibliometric analysis. Yet this impression is supported by the fact that only a small proportion of Sartori's extensive corpus of writings has been translated into French: only three of his many books, namely *Democrazia e definizioni / Democratic Theory* (Sartori, 1974), *Pluralismo, multiculturalismo e estranei* (Sartori, 2003), and *Parties and Party Systems* (Sartori, 2011, published in Belgium), and the same holds for reviews of his works, equally rare.[3] With regard to articles and book chapters, these are similarly limited in number, frequently dated, and occasionally published solely due to the multilingual nature of certain outlets, as exemplified by the *International Social Science Journal*. These articles and chapters offer little illustration of Sartori's overall production, with the notable exception of the French version of the renowned 'Comparing and Miscomparing', which appeared in the inaugural issue of the *RIPC* (Sartori, 1994). It is clear, thus, that a facilitating condition for his influence has been lacking.[4] It is to remedy this lack that this *RIPC* special issue will include, in addition to articles on various aspects of Sartori's work, a translation of most of the long inaugural article from the launching issue of the *RISP* (Sartori, 1971a), itself an expanded version of the worldwide famous 'Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics' published the previous year by the *APSR* (Sartori, 1970).

[1] The special issue in preparation is co-edited by Luca Verzichelli and myself and contains my reflections on how his works were received in France; these are developed at greater length here. At this time (December 2025), the *Italian Political Science Review* is assembling articles, some of them already available in first view, revisiting Sartori's legacy as well.

[2] However, this is not true regarding dominant epistemological and methodological orientations, where the differences are quite substantial. By slightly oversimplifying medium-term trends, one may say that Italian political science follows a form of moderate positivism, makes extensive use of quantitative analytical techniques, and is attentive to maintaining clear boundaries with other disciplines. French political science, by contrast, is primarily interpretative, mostly qualitative, and open to external disciplinary influences, foremost among them sociology (Roux, 2025a). In this respect, the Italian case appears broadly aligned with the European international mainstream, whereas the French case stands as an outlier. This sketchy characterisation, however, would deserve a detailed, subfield-specific and diachronic examination which is not the scope of this article.

[3] Among the significant exceptions, see Mattei Dogan's review of *Democrazia e definizioni* in the *RFSP* (10(1), 1960, pp. 180-181) as well as reviews of the French translation of *Parties and Party Systems* by Christophe Roux in *Pôle Sud* (35, 2011, pp. 176-178) and by Camille Bedock in the *RFSP* (63(3), 2013, pp. 711-713).

[4] Whilst fifteen years ago, Sartori's influence on party theory in France could be still defined as 'underground' (*souterraine*) (Ducoulombier, 2011, p. 192), one may note, impressionistically again, that in the last decade or so citations in that subfield seem less rare in France. Pending on a more systematic analysis, it may be partly explained, one the one hand, by the French translation of *Parties and Party Systems*, on the other hand, in the context of an unexpected alteration of the entrenched bipolar pattern of party competition in France. For a discussion of the usefulness and limitations of the Sartorian scheme on this point beyond the French case, see Bardi (2025) and Chiaramonte, Emanuele and Improta (2025).

This contribution, therefore, focuses on possible explanations for this missed encounter, restricting our discussion to France.[5] It first briefly justifies why the question is worth asking. It then offers possible explanations for this state of affairs. It concludes with considerations about translating Sartori's works.

2. *Capo*. Sartori in France: A Question Worth Raising

Scarcely translated, rarely reviewed and, overall, seldom cited, Sartori has been the object of an undeniable lack of interest in France. Truth be told, he is far from isolated in this respect and surely finds himself in excellent company within the French Pantheon of major political scientists who have not been read much. But should one even be surprised? I believe that the answer to this preliminary question should be affirmative.

French postwar political science is distinguished, among other features, by its perceived resistance to external influences, reflecting a commitment to national autonomy that is acknowledged both domestically and internationally (Roux, 2025a). Should the situation therefore be summed up, as the anonymous foreign observer quoted by Pierre Favre in the mid-1990s suggested, with the idea that, in political science, France 'neither imports nor exports' (Favre, 1996, p. 236)? This statement is arguably excessive, particularly when viewed in the context of the period during which Sartori experienced his most prolific years as an academic in Italy, spanning from the 1950s to the 1970s.

At that time, political science had already been established in the United States but was still in the process of being reconfigured, while it was only gradually taking shape in Europe. Consequently, the internationalisation dynamics of the discipline cannot be assessed in the same way as they would be later. It was not yet significantly marked by the assertion of American global leadership and its repercussions for Europe. Until the 1960s, France was less marginal than it would later become: it still represented an intellectual centre with some power of attraction. French was still regarded as a genuinely international language. UNESCO, which played a role in promoting political science (Boncourt, 2009), had its headquarters in Paris, and the IPSA that emerged from its initiatives benefited for several years from the presence of active French scholars holding relevant positions. This situation owed much to the activity of the *Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques* – responsible for funding the newly created Paris *Institut d'Études Politiques* in 1945, following the nationalisation of the *École Libre des Sciences Politiques* – within which worked a few French scholars familiar, by personal background and experience, with international exchanges. Some, in particular, had paid close attention to Italian issues and had sometimes worked in Italy (such as Mattei Dogan, Jean Meynaud, and Jean Meyriat). Furthermore, an analysis of the authors published or discussed in the *Revue Française de Science Politique* (*RFSP*) (Leca, 2001), or the space devoted to reviews of foreign authors in its first two decades (Déloye, 2021, pp. 863-865), demonstrates a significant level of international openness. In my view, France was less 'insular' then than it would become and was better positioned to accommodate some of Sartori's work. Consequently, the question of why Sartori's works were not

[5] Every national (and sometimes even subnational) scholarly community has its own tendencies; for instance, the engagement with anglophone literature appears more open in Switzerland or in Belgium than it is in France.

considered with greater enthusiasm merits consideration. However, upon examination, the situation appears to be explicable.

3. Academic obstacles… but not only

Several reasons can be suggested to explain Sartori's lack of visibility in France. A first reason is cultural in nature. To begin with, in many (but not all) fields, the dominant direction of intellectual exchange across the Alps in the immediate post-war period essentially ran west to east in an asymmetrical configuration. France tended to export its intellectual frameworks, and educated Italians who generally mastered French (much as they master English today) tended then to pay greater attention to what was written in France, while the reverse was much less true.

A second reason lies in the fact that the institutionalisation of political science in Italy lagged behind that observed in France. Despite the existence of a few political science faculties in Italy while there were none in France as such, the *Association Française de Science Politique* (note the singular, though somewhat misleading, title) was founded in 1951 – more than two decades before the political science branch of the Italian Association of Political and Social Sciences gained autonomy (in 1973), leading to the full independence of the SISP in 1981. Similarly, the *RFSP* was published twenty years before the launching issue of the *RISP* – even if the articles it published would not always be considered today as actual political science (Déloye, 2021). There was, thus, no obvious reason for French political scientists, then consolidating their own discipline in research centres supported by the FNSP and the *Centre National pour la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS)[6], to turn primarily to Italian scholarship in general, or to that of Sartori in particular, who stood out as a recognised but isolated figure.

To these two factors, one must add the fact, third and foremost, that Sartori's intellectual influences appear less specifically Italian (although his original philosophical matrix mostly was) than situated largely in the English-speaking world, and more specifically in the United States – an assessment shared retrospectively by the colleagues who evolved within Sartori's immediate circle (Valbruzzi, 2024). His work drew upon a scholarship that French political scientists did not find appealing and which they even increasingly distanced themselves from (Roux, 2025a).[7] From the early 1960s onwards, Sartori increasingly published in English: as for books, his recently republished *Democrazia e definizioni* (Sartori, 1957), arguably his first volume fully belonging to political science, was translated in the United States in 1962; regarding journals, he published articles in *Political Studies* in the UK from 1958 and in the *APSR* from 1962. Moreover, his formal applications for research leave abroad – then subject to

[6] By contrast, this sheds light on the difference between the significant and enduring support for political science from CNRS in France compared with the lack of a similar involvement by CNR in Italy.

[7] As Déloye (2009, p. 9) recalls, as early as 1967, AFSP general secretary Jean Touchard observed, upon returning from the IPSA congress in Brussels, that 'a kind of international circle dominated by Americans, but which includes a few Europeans such as Mr Rokkan or Mr Sartori, seems to be forming, without any French specialist being part of it.' Moreover, the Association expressed its concern regarding a roundtable on political regimes where Duverger's contribution was refuted 'without any reference being made to the works published after' the publication of his pocket book (in the *Que sais-je ?* series) on this topic, and 'without any French speaker intervening in a critical discussion' that was 'introduced by a particularly severe G. Sartori in his judgement of M. Duverger's work.'

authorisation from the Italian Ministry of Public Instruction (responsible for universities) – demonstrate his predilection for the United States, with no fewer than four extended semester- or year-long visits to Harvard, Yale and Stanford between 1964 and 1971 (Roux, 2025b).

This American orientation is all the more significant in that it did not stem from a lack of familiarity with French political science. As a matter of fact, Sartori's interest is evident in his insightful commentary on the 'revival of political science in France', which was based on a comprehensive review of several textbooks designed to support the 'political science methods' course that was introduced into the national law degree programme in the mid-1950s.[8] He examined the works of Georges Burdeau, Maurice Duverger, and Jean Meynaud. The Florentine scholar noted that 'it may seem sad that, to remember a science born in Italy and an utterly Italian author such as Mosca, one must have to look abroad', but he found it reassuring that 'the revival of political science is now occurring in a country whose cultural traditions have so much affinity with our own' (1960, p. 461). These similarities were perhaps more pronounced than they are today: the parliamentary structure of the Fourth Republic, its cabinet instability, the presence of a significant, though short-lived, Christian-Democratic party, and a society still marked by rurality and Catholicism all contributed to this. Thus, Sartori engaged in a careful and, unsurprisingly, unsparing discussion of these authors, identifying their merits while dropping, where necessary (that is, for him, often), incisive and merciless remarks on the weaker parts of the texts under review.[9] His distancing from Duverger – a figure that found fewer and fewer admirers within French political science while the discipline was becoming more institutionalised[10] – is well known and has been noted and discussed (Novák, 2015). And when, in 1971, Sartori wrote the editorial for the first issue of the *RISP*, the French case served as a negative reference point:

> "The title 'Italian Journal of Political Science' does not shine for its originality. We are preceded by at least two journals of illustrious tradition: the *American Political Science Review* (which dates back to 1906) and the *Revue Française de Science Politique*. However, our journal will imitate neither of these models. The American prototype has become highly technical; the French prototype remains, to our taste, too variegated and syncretic. The *RISP* occupies an intermediate position: less technical than the American model, and more rigorous than the French model" (Sartori, 1971b, p. 4).

[8] No departments of political science existed in France at the time in the faculties that hosted the discipline, that is, law faculties, while the newly created 'institutes for political studies', originally designed to prepare candidates for competitive exams to become civil servants, operated under the joint authority of the faculties of law and of arts and humanities, gaining autonomy only from the late 1960s.

[9] Thus, regarding Burdeau's *Traité de science politique*, Sartori notes 'that it has not been received where Burdeau wished to place it, not to say that it has been received as a fossil'; consulting Duverger's book, which he finds too flat because too narrowly focused on research techniques, he nonetheless remarks that, by comparison, one 'has the sensation of having suddenly passed to another planet. Duverger speaks of matters of which Burdeau is ignorant' (Sartori, 1960, p. 461).

[10] This development is the result of paradigm shifts within both French political science and French constitutional law; this complex process has been examined by François (2010).

Thus, Sartori distanced himself from the 'resurgent' French political science of the time not out of ignorance, but knowingly.[11]

A further set of intellectual considerations may be added: namely, the epistemological, conceptual, and theoretical nature of much of his work at a time when the empirical turn, largely centred on electoral studies, was already under way in France, and the very limited institutionalisation of comparative politics (a central component of Sartori's conception of the discipline) as a subfield of French political science. All these elements also hindered his reception.

Finally, these factors combined with one last 'aggravating' element: Sartori's personal ideological positioning. The choices that emerge in his work and his explicit stances – his principled anti-Marxism evident in his lectures on the history of philosophy in the 1950s, his clear anti-communism, his opposition to the 1968 student movement in Italy during his tenure as Dean of the Faculty of Political Sciences in Florence (Roux, 2025b) – reflect a consistently liberal-conservative orientation. This was consistent with both his background and the prevailing atmosphere in his Faculty of Political Sciences in the post-war years, when several professors had espoused liberal positions within the newly established parliamentary democracy after having, at times actively, supported the Fascist regime. Examples of this include his mentor and supervisor Pompeo Biondi, and his predecessor as Dean for nearly two decades, Giuseppe Maranini. This ideological stance ran counter to the gradual background shift of French social science after 1968, and which, later on, within sociology and political science, would only be reinforced by the rise of the 'Bourdieu moment' (Braud, 1996) in the discipline (Leca, 1982), advocating an intrinsically 'critical' function for academic research in a vein akin to the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer, 2002).

The pertinence of this assertion is exemplified by the publication in 1974 of the first of his books translated into French (*Democrazia e definizioni*). As Sartori himself noted in his preface, the French edition was regarded as 'the most complete' (Sartori, 1974, p. VII) because of the nature of the texts it included.[12] Nevertheless, the volume was preceded by a concise preface by Serge Hurtig, director of the hosting '*Analyse politique*' series[13], who deemed it necessary to issue a warning to French readers:

> "Sartori's attachment to the market economy, presented as uniquely compatible with democracy, his refusal of planning [of the Soviet type …], his realism – the greatest danger for democracy is expecting too much of it – mean that some readers may take him for a conservative or even a reactionary. Many thinkers, he replies, are important to us because they have posed important questions, and no matter if, in their own time, they did not go "in the direction of history". […]

[11] Indeed, evoking the development of post-war empirical research under American influence, he wrote: 'The French, always jealous of a primacy that is not theirs, at times speak of it as political science à *l'américaine*.' (Sartori, 1986, p. 98).

[12] The French version is in fact based on the translation – by Christiane Hurtig, *née* Tirimagni, a specialist of India – of the revised 1965 American edition, which was adapted and expanded from the second 1958 edition of the original Italian text, and supplemented by the translation of the two contributions written by Sartori on 'democracy' and 'representative systems' for the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, published in 1968.

[13] The series, which would publish only four volumes, had among its stated aims the presentation 'to French-speaking readers of works which, in various fields of political science, are considered classics or deserve to be so regarded.'

> Sartori's book is necessarily situated and dated: it was conceived in Italy in the 1950s and bears the imprint of a response to the defeated fascism and the threatening communism of the time. It is a defence of liberal democracy – one based on popular assent, on competition within elites arbitrated by the masses, on the limitation of governmental power. It is for the reader to judge whether the political history and thought of the past twenty years have rendered this theory of democracy obsolete or, on the contrary, demonstrated its validity" (Hurtig, 1974, p. vi).

Sartori's own preface included a discreet Aronian jab[14] – Raymond Aron, seldom cited by French political scientists, was one of the rare French authors he held in esteem (Sartori, 1986, p. 100).[15] Such a characterisation captures the implicit normative disjunction between French and Italian post-war contexts, which created an unfavourable environment for the reception of a reference that could appear intellectually distant and ideologically unappealing.

A final but not minor point deserves mention: French political science underwent an intellectual maturation marked by the increasing influence of sociology from the 1970s – so much so that sociology has been said to have 'cannibalised' political science (Lefèbvre, 2017, p. 23). Meanwhile, in the context of the restructuring of Italian political science faculties in the late 1960s (Palano, 2005), Sartori became a determined advocate of distinguishing political science from sociology (even if he knew such a distinction to be partly artificial) (Sartori, 1969). It means that the very condition French political scientists defined as necessary for the growth of political science in France was precisely the one Sartori identified, with enduring success, as a forbidden partnership in Italy. It is no small thing. This may further account for the apparent paradox between Sartori's sustained interest in, and at times favourable assessment of, the French semi-presidential model on the one hand, and the enduring neglect of his work within France on the other. With the progressive 'sociologisation' of French political science, the analysis of political institutions has long been regarded as the preserve of legal scholars rather than political scientists – a perception that has only recently begun to be contested, as evidenced by the belated emergence of legislative studies in France (Nay, 2003; Costa, 2025). Sartori's engagement with institutional analysis therefore failed to align with the dominant intellectual orientations of many of his French contemporaries.

To summarise, Giovanni Sartori appears as a scholar operating in a country then more influenced than influential in Franco-Italian intellectual exchanges; a defender of a discipline he embodied alone, and thus isolated rather than embedded in a sufficiently institutionalised community capable of influencing; critical of French scholarship and oriented instead towards American political science; promoting disciplinary priorities

[14] 'Writings on "new democracy" are numerous, yet it seems to me that reason has been impoverished to the extent that enthusiasm has increased. The anonymous author who, in May 1968, inscribed on the walls of Paris the slogan "Imagination in power" had common sense to spare: it is indeed imagination that our age requires. But imagination remains nowhere to be found. Better to acknowledge this than to pass off as novelties ancient recipes and therapies that have always failed.' (Sartori, 1974, p. VII)

[15] Sartori wrote relatively little on Aron's influence. While Aron shared with Sartori several characteristics—including a modernising conception of the social sciences, a broad engagement with social theory, and a liberal understanding of politics—he was also distinguished by his sustained focus on, and significant contributions to, international relations, a subfield in which Sartori himself was not directly involved.

that differed significantly from those emerging in France (centrality of language, importance of comparison, defence of more hermetically defined disciplinary boundaries), and having a liberal-conservative temperament at a time when the French academic community was becoming increasingly progressive and sometimes even radical. Under such conditions, it is hardly surprising that Sartori failed to achieve in France a visibility comparable to the one he enjoyed in other countries, or to that attained in France by other foreign scholars who were translated, and who attracted the attention of political scientists (such as Norbert Elias or Charles Tilly to quote only two examples[16]). This failed encounter, as one can see, thus stems as much from Sartori's own profile as from the peculiarities of French political science.

4. *Coda*. Is It Difficult to Translate Sartori?

This relative lack of familiarity with Sartori's work in France has not prevented French political science from growing. But it may have hindered, in certain respects, possibilities for dialogue or collaboration that enrich academic work. For this reason, occasions such as the Sartorian centenary are more than mere moments of ceremonial commemoration. They can be regarded as opportunities to provide the social sciences with a renewed shared transnational intellectual repertoire from which scholars may draw as they see fit. In our case, one possible way to move in this direction is to make Sartori's scholarship more accessible in French, even though it neither offers (nor seeks) any guarantee of influence, particularly in the case of a scholar whose work, though powerful, is inevitably shaped by the passing of time. As noted in the introduction, this is what I attempted with the translation of the 1971 essay '*La politica comparata: premesse e problemi*', an experience on which I would like to offer a few brief and conclusive reflections.

When faced with the translation of a 'canonical' text – especially one by an author who prizes conceptual clarity and linguistic rigour – it is hardly surprising that the translator should feel a certain degree of anguish. Earlier shortcomings and errors have been sharply criticised, as evidenced by the misleading interpretations found in certain French translations of Max Weber's works (Grossein, 2006). In this regard, it is worth recalling – without any claim to originality – the particular position of the political scientist as a translator. In certain respects, it resembles a variant of the impostor's dilemma. In our discipline, as in others, many foreign-language texts merit translation so that they may be read and debated by those who lack sufficient command of the original language, or who simply have no access to the text (for instance, when it is out of print or unavailable in libraries). To address this gap, despite the growing use of English as a *lingua franca*, the translation of texts in political science (and in human and social sciences more broadly) calls for two distinct skills. The first is a strictly linguistic competence, enabling the translator to render into his or her native language a text written in a foreign language that he or she knows well enough. The second is an academic expertise that represents the added value of the specialist translator as opposed to the generalist. A minority of French citizens speak Italian (and vice versa), yet those who are

[16] It should be noted that being Italian is not the issue here. Norberto Bobbio, for instance, occupies a much more significant place in the French editorial landscape, with many of his volumes being translated.

also versed in political science are even fewer (in both countries), and those willing to devote their precious time to translation fewer still. One must understand not only the words themselves but also the context in which they occur and the debates to which they relate. However, unlike professional translators in other fields (e.g. technical or literary translation), political scientists who undertake translation do not receive specialised training for the task. It might be a reason why it is not rare, in France, that publishers commission 'artistic' translators to render social science works, with results of varying quality. So, is translating Sartori a difficult undertaking? *Traduttore, traditore?*

Here is my experience in a nutshell. Without being able to fully explain why, I had already had the opportunity to translate several academic texts, mostly from Italian into French. I strove to perform this work as well as I could, within the familiar context of countless overlapping commitments that leave little time for calm, focused effort. In hindsight, this led me to make translation errors which, while not necessarily compromising the meaning of the texts, remain nonetheless embarrassing (*scripta manent*). One difficulty arises from the fact that I began learning Italian relatively late, at the age of 23-24, and that my acquisition of Italian was essentially oral. Yet using a foreign language for interpersonal or professional communication is far less demanding than mastering it in written form. Moreover, in my experience – which I presume is shared by many foreigners – my (almost invariably kind) Italian interlocutors seldom corrected my mistakes in accentuation, syntax, vocabulary, or pronunciation, provided they could understand me despite my accent. This 'learning through experience' is indeed an effective way to gain confidence in the practical use of a language, but it also explains why recurring errors can become ingrained without the speaker even realising it. Only with time, and what one might term maturity, did I come to appreciate that, although my communication had been fluent during my years in Italy, my command of Dante's language was less polished than I had imagined (and flattered myself for). Moreover, the idea that linguistic competence remains unaffected after immersion ceases is, *hélas, cent fois hélas*, an illusion.

These banal observations resurfaced sharply when I had to translate Sartori. The two sociologists who introduced a collection of Max Weber's writings to American readers in the mid-1940s invoked a classic of translation theory – A. F. Tyler's *Principles of Translation* (1791) – to summarise the approach they had adopted: 'to give a complete transcript of the original ideas; to imitate the style of the original author; and to preserve the ease of the original text' (Gerth and Mills, 1946, p. v). Like them, I attempted to fulfil my task as best I could with respect to the first principle. The second and third, however, proved more challenging, presenting difficulties that were not significant in substance but were unexpectedly time-consuming. Thus, it was less the conceptual vocabulary of the Florentine scholar than certain idiomatic turns of phrase – used in written Italian by a Tuscan author of philosophical culture writing before I was born – which often forced me to pause. These expressions either have no direct equivalent in French or exist only with nuances subtler than I could reliably grasp. In oral communication, a missing word is often clarified by context. In writing, however, one must choose words with precision to avoid ambiguity, and *pressapochismo* is decidedly not an option in a scholarly text. In addition, the thought of an imagined Sartori peering over my shoulder with a sarcastic expression lent a certain impetus to that endeavour. It gave rise to doubts over minor

details, the resolution of which was scarcely proportionate to their significance for the overall translation. The final result, which readers alone will judge, is therefore necessarily a compromise between scholarly rigour and 'literary' scruples. This was where the most significant difficulties in Sartori's text lay.

In any case, I considered it both useful and important – for the discipline and for Franco-Italian, as well as broader European, academic and cultural cooperation – that Sartori's writings be made more accessible to a wider audience. Whilst the 1970–1971 text has, in certain respects, aged, its insistence on the need, following C. Wright Mills, to be 'conscious thinkers' seems to me entirely timeless in our era of big data and artificial intelligence. This translation arrives belatedly, no doubt, but, as a foreign adage has it, *il n'est jamais trop tard pour bien faire*.

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