

# The topicality of Augusto Del Noce

This monographic issue of *Cultura Económica* is dedicated to the Italian philosopher Augusto Del Noce (1910-1989), who in recent years has aroused growing interest in the international context as evidenced by the translation of some of his important works into English and Spanish. This interest in his writings has as much to do with his speculative vigor, which undoubtedly makes him one of the leading Italian and European Catholic philosophers of the 20th century, as with his many insights that today, more than thirty years after his death, have found substantial confirmation.

Reconstructing the long philosophical and biographical itinerary of Del Noce in an editorial would be impossible, such is the richness of his writings in terms of content and arguments. In the contributions that appear in this monographic issue, the reader will have the opportunity to see how profound his speculative performance was both on the historical-philosophical and on the more strictly theoretical, especially in the field of political philosophy. Here we simply limit ourselves to giving a general frame of reference that can give an idea of the immensity of the intellectual commitment of this extraordinary scholar, whose speculative work was also accompanied by a considerable civil commitment.

On a theoretical level, Del Noce, since the years immediately after the Second World War, has tried to overcome certain positions of a majority in the Catholic world of the time, aimed at rejecting *tout court* any dialogue with Modernity both in its philosophical aspect as in its political-institutional aspects. The youthful suggestions derived from reading Maritain's *Humanisme intégral* will accompany him throughout the years, even when, at a certain point, he moves away from the French philosopher and from certain post-conciliar fashions that he considered negative for Christian thought.

One of his most original and important proposals on a historical-philosophical level is undoubtedly that of overcoming the unilateral vision of philosophical Modernity typical of the neo-scholastic approach that dominated until the Second Vatican Council. Rather than viewing the Cartesian *cogito* as the beginning of a philosophical path destined to culminate in 19th-century atheism, Del Noce suggests dividing the history of modern philosophy into two strands: the first, which ultimately succeeded, is the one that begins in Descartes, it continues with German

idealism and culminates in Marx's atheism; the second, originates in Descartes passes through Pascal, Vico, Malenbrache and finally reaches its culminating point in the philosophy of being of the Italian philosopher Antonio Rosmini.

In the light of a new hermeneutical framework based on an original reading of Cartesian philosophy as a philosophy of freedom, Del Noce considers Marx's theoretical step fundamental to understand not only the history of modern philosophy but also of contemporary history. From his point of view, in fact, the choice in favor of the philosophy of praxis made by Marx against the entire Western tradition, from Plato to Hegel, opened a completely new scenario in the relationship between philosophy and politics. With Marx and, above all, with the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the primacy of political and economic praxis over philosophy “becomes global” and conditions all the historical events of the 20th century.

It is the famous transpolitical interpretation of contemporary history founded, for Del Noce, precisely on the assumption that Marxism is the culminating moment in the history of modern philosophy. Only starting from these philosophical or, perhaps, it would be better to say, post-philosophical coordinates, based precisely on the primacy of praxis, can all contemporary history be understood.

From this general hermeneutical thesis, Del Noce made fundamental contributions on other central themes of the historiographic and philosophical debate that characterized the second half of the 20th century until 1989, the year of his death and the fall of the Berlin Wall. For example, in works such as *The Suicide of the Revolution* (1978) or *Giovanni Gentile. For a philosophical interpretation of contemporary history* (published posthumously in 1990), Del Noce offered an original interpretation of the relationship between the fascist, Nazi and communist ideologies and the idealism of Giovanni Gentile (also in his relations with the Mussolini regime and with the thought of Antonio Gramsci). For him, all these ideologies linked to the phenomenon of totalitarianism were not an exceptional or temporary phenomenon, but are found within the same post-Marxist context of the primacy of praxis, which eliminates any transcendent dimension, constituting the basis for the continuity of the equally problematic “affluent society”.

Precisely in reference to this last issue, we believe that it is important today to re-meditate on the analyzes that Del Noce dedicates

to the sociocultural and political developments of Western society after 1968. In fact, since the end of the Cold War and in the phase of the so-called globalization, Catholic philosophy and theology are facing new challenges that are also the result of very concrete ideal choices made over the years. Especially from the end of the sixties with the affirmation of new cultural fashions linked to the issues of liberation and sexual customs and the affirmation of the utilitarian paradigm that guided globalization in the last decades until the crisis of 2007-2008, it would seem not represent something other than the realization of that “affluent society” of which Del Noce spoke.

The latter transformed the man at the *center of creation* into a mere tool at the service of anonymous economic-financial mechanisms or processes promoting consumption, efficiency and profit as maximum values. As Del Noce had predicted, we are experiencing the triumph of technocratic reason and the decline of any reference to *logos*, to transcendence or to any instance that is not attributable to praxis and instrumental action, according to Max Weber's famous diagnosis. Faced with such economic and, more generally, cultural scenarios, how should Catholic thought interested in safeguarding the truth value of Christianity and its positive contribution to the history of humanity position itself?

In the historical and cultural context in which he lived, Del Noce has always criticized, considering them negative, those philosophical-theological trends that, since the Second Vatican Council, have deluded themselves with the idea that dialogue with Modernity implied almost necessarily the assumption of a secular utilitarianism and Marxist philosophical categories. In the Italian political context, the reflection of these theoretical orientations was the famous *Historical Compromise* between the Christian Democrats and the Italian Communist Party during the 1970s. Setting aside these more strictly political developments to focus on the more theoretical dimension, we only recall that for Del Noce, where Catholic philosophy or theology has followed this path, they have had to assume the self-understanding of Modernity proper to secular thought (especially Marxist), who sees in the category of secularization a kind of destiny of the West and, even a moment of purification of the Christian-Catholic thought itself.

Del Noce, on the contrary, sought a positive comparison with Modernity from his plural reading of the latter, starting precisely from those authors such as Antonio Rosmini who tried to incorporate the

modern instance of freedom while preserving it from the atheistic or even nihilistic outcomes of modern and contemporary philosophy. Faced with the idea that Modernity, starting with Marx, must necessarily be interpreted through the philosophical category of the *Revolution*, Del Noce suggests recovering that based on the philosophical category of *Risorgimento*. In his eyes, only a thought that moves in the wake of the philosophy of being can save Catholicism from the risk of being subordinate to secular thought and ultimately being marginalized as a spiritual force operating in today's society.

If one of the most interesting and debated proposals in recent years is that of Jürgen Habermas on the need to build a post-secular society in which the great religious traditions can make a decisive contribution to curb the consequences of a society inclined to nihilism, then Del Noce's thought can undoubtedly constitute an important stimulus to articulate a philosophical proposal with a Catholic root that manages to have its own place in the current debate.

It is with this sincere conviction that we entrust the articles and essays that make up this issue to readers.

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