

Christianity and Political Thought

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Christianity and Political Thought: Augusto Del Noce and the Ideology of Christian Democracy in Post-War Italy

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ABSTRACT

This article engages with the thought of Augusto Del Noce (1910-1989), the most important Italian Catholic philosopher and political thinker of the twentieth century. The focus is on how Del Noce came to elaborate a Catholic ‘modernity,’ bridging a positive encounter between Catholicism, democracy, and freedom. This philosophical project had a considerable impact on modern Italian culture and politics. At the theoretical level, the argument is embedded within a larger aim to recognize attempts within Catholic philosophy to articulate an Italian political trajectory that does not simply accept the tale of a singular path to modernity based on the Enlightenment model, but instead tries to articulate an alternative vision of the modern, grounded within a transcendental perspective.

KEYWORDS: Atheism, Catholicism, Christian Democracy, Augusto Del Noce, Modernity, Secularism

WORD COUNT: 10,694

The aim of this article is to shed light on the intellectual trajectory of Augusto Del Noce, the most important Catholic philosopher of twentieth century Italy. One of the most original and incisive voices of post-World War II Italian culture, Del Noce radically confronted the problem of atheism and its relationship with modern thought. Against modernity defined as the ‘age of secularization’ⁱ and immanentism, Del Noce outlined an alternative concept of modernity open to transcendence. Put briefly, Del Noce sought to reposition the modern project as compatible with a Catholic-religious vision of politics and history—to develop and re-substantiate the modern call to freedom from within a Christian tradition. This required a deep philosophical-historical re-conceptualization of modernity; it also required the development of a political platform from where such a vision could come to function, steering Italy in a meaningful direction after the painful experience of Fascism.

Del Noce’s re-thinking of modernity deserves fuller attention and careful scrutiny for a very simple reason: this attempt happened precisely when Catholics, through Christian Democracy (*Democrazia Cristiana*, DC), became the dominant political force of the new republican Italy, and central actors in the process of building a modern mass democracy and a modern welfare state. Christian Democracy was in postwar Italy (as in many other European countries) the central forum for institutionalizing Catholic modernity.

Del Noce’s intellectual trajectory intersects at various points, and often conflictually so, with larger political debates of post-war Italy, the development of political Catholicism, and intellectual debates within the Christian democratic movement. He constantly tried to reconcile and balance philosophical reflection and political vocation, as he believed that ‘rethinking philosophy is the first problem of today’s politics, so that the political becomes Politics in a Platonic sense, correcting an imperfect world.’ⁱⁱ The red thread in Del Noce’s work was the ideological and political problem of

Catholics: that is, to understand how Catholics could participate and act in politics without being subordinate to other political-cultural positions—bringing into politics, society and human history the identity, novelty, and specificity of Catholicism.ⁱⁱⁱ Engaging the work of Del Noce, therefore, means to engage an indeed crucial chapter of modern Italian history.

If one compares with the major *secular* thinkers of twentieth century Italy, like Antonio Gramsci, Benedetto Croce, Giovanni Gentile, or Norberto Bobbio, Del Noce is relatively unknown among English readers.^{iv} This lack of external visibility may to a large extent be explained by the fact that his writings were never translated into English—only very recently a volume has made available in English including a selection of Del Noce’s essays and lectures.^v However, the neglect of Del Noce’s work outside Italy certainly does not mirror the real influence he exerted on Italian intellectual history. A very humble aim of this article is therefore quite simply to indicate the richness and complexity of Del Noce’s philosophy to a wider audience, inviting for further discussion.

However, our specific discussion must be placed in a wider context that further serves to indicate its relevance. Compared with other genealogies of Italian political ideologies, Catholic philosophy is without a shadow of doubt one of the least discussed by theorists and historians of political ideas—and this is particularly so for the Anglo-Saxon reception of Italian intellectual history. This relative neglect might be due to the simple fact that most scholars of modern Italy and Europe never really accepted or took seriously Catholicism (and Christian Democracy) as a set of philosophical or political ideas in the first place.^{vi} However, the 1940s and the 1950s were the golden age not only of Sartre, Camus and Raymond Aron, but also of figures like Jacques Maritain in France, Karl Jaspers in Germany, and Del Noce in Italy. We need to reconfigure the way in which we think about the direction of intellectual life in Europe after 1945.^{vii}

Scholars often insist that Christian Democracy, especially in its Catholic-inspired Italian version, represented no real tradition of political thought and ideology, and that it was ‘just’ a matter of constructing strong parties and movements.^{viii} Even Jan-Werner Müller, whose work has had the undisputed merit to put Christian Democracy on the academic map, ultimately ends on a fairly reductionist stance, which primarily views Christian Democracy as a ‘bargain’ of ideas. Müller ascertains that the success of Christian Democracy rested on two essential factors: ‘a particular electoral alliance of the middle class and the peasantry’ and ‘the fact that the traditional right had been so thoroughly discredited alongside fascism.’^{ix} In other words, Christian Democracy mostly filled a void. Yet, as we will show, Del Noce’s authorship testifies how Catholic political ideology *did* offer spiritual and intellectual resources of intrinsic value. We need to recognize that Christian democracy came to rest on philosophical tenets and ideological contents that cannot simply be reduced to a cosmetic operation by which a substantially Liberal order was made digestible and legitimate to post-Fascist society.

Our argument will proceed as follows: we will start by briefly presenting Del Noce’s biography and intellectual path in order to accommodate new readers of his work. In subsequent sections we will focus on the contents of Del Noce’s thought, especially as it developed in the early postwar period, briefly indicating and exemplifying the imprint his thought had on political developments. We will also place Del Noce’s elaboration on the modern within the wider debate in Italian political Catholicism: more specifically we will refer to the Catholic appropriation of modernity as attempted by Giuseppe Dossetti, the most important figure of Italian Christian Democracy together with the party’s leader and prime minister (from 1945 to 1953) Alcide De Gasperi. The links to other European thinkers will be stressed, in particular the relationship to Jacques Maritain, but also the ‘encounter’ with Austrian political theorist Eric Voegelin. We will end by indicating the contemporary relevance of Del Noce’s philosophical reflection.

Augusto Del Noce's Background Experiences and his Intellectual Environment

As Del Noce's work is not widely known, a few words of introduction will serve to frame the argument that follows.^x Del Noce was born in Pistoia, Tuscany, but grew up and studied in Turin, where he moved with his mother at the onset of World War I. In 1932 he completed a degree in Philosophy at the University of Turin, with a dissertation on Malebranche under the direction of Adolfo Faggi. Faggi was a philosopher and psychologist close to a kind thinking one might name 'spiritualistic positivism.' Between 1934 and 1943 Del Noce taught at various high schools and published a series of essays on early modern French philosophy that established his academic reputation, not least in France where his work received praise by scholars such as Etienne Gilson and Henri Gouhier. His studies on modern rationalism reflected a broader interest in the relationship between Catholic thought and secular culture that he had developed during the years in Turin, and that would remain central to his life-work.

Fascism and the painful experiences of World War II were formative events for Del Noce. As for so many other Italian thinkers, 1943 turned out a pivotal year for his intellectual formation and political engagement.^{xi} The year of the fall of the Fascist regime and the collapse of the state provoked him to think of politics of the presence within a trajectory of long-term history and civilizational development—not unlike Karl Jaspers' experience and positioning of the crisis within an axial age perspective.^{xii} Aware of the depth of the crisis, Del Noce sensed an acute need to trace and re-establish the distinctive patterns with which Catholics could imagine and institutionally forge some kind of accommodation with democracy, national secular politics, and the modern world.

Here the encounter with Jacques Maritain proved decisive. From 1944 onwards Del Noce supported and collaborated with Christian Democracy, becoming increasingly involved in political debates. Constantly appealing to Christian traditions, and inspired by Maritain, he invited Catholics to come out of medievalism and anti-modernity in order to

understand the possible link between Catholicism and liberalism: only in that way could Christian Democrats attune democracy and Christianity. From the 1950s Del Noce was committed to giving theoretical shape and strength to the Christian Democracy project as formulated by De Gasperi, nourishing the secret, and in the end frustrated, ambition, to be his philosopher, just as Gramsci had been the philosopher for Palmiro Togliatti.

Del Noce became frustrated with what he considered Christian Democracy's cultural weakness. Without its own interpretation of contemporary history and increasingly distancing itself from its (Catholic) ideological and cultural background, Christian Democracy was being subjugated by others political cultures. While assuming the character of a modern, pragmatic mass party, the DC oscillated between 'laicism' and 'clericalism.' It developed its politics and policies merely in terms of 'tactics'^{xiii} and 'sociological techniques.' Catholics, he believed, could be fully modern and democratic counting on their *own* ideological and religious roots without the need to rely on inspirations and sources alien to their own traditions. Even as the party was gaining its electoral consensus, it was, according to Del Noce, starting to reveal a terrifying vacuum in terms of ideas and perspectives. It was therefore not ideologically equipped to face and counter-act the expansion and electoral gains of the Communist Party during the 1960s and 1970s.

Del Noce's philosophical approach to the modern happened within the larger Catholic environment of which he was a part. Another towering figure here was certainly Giuseppe Dossetti.^{xiv} From the end of the war until the early 1950s, Dossetti had been active within Christian Democracy—as the main opponent of De Gasperi—with the aim of transforming the party into a force able to fulfill the expectations of the poor, implementing a substantial democracy on a holistic vision of the human person. This involved—without deflecting from a deep anti-Communism and anti-Marxism—the dialogue and collaboration with those 'men of good faith' (including Communists) who

attacked the moral evils of liberalism and Capitalism. Dossetti was deeply dissatisfied with De Gasperi's government line in terms of politics, economic policy and international alliances. In the end, Dossetti believed that it was impossible to reform Italian politics and the State; or better, he was convinced that Italian politics could be reformed only on the condition that the Church be reformed and, embracing and guiding the modern world, regain its leading role in history. This conviction pushed him to play an important role in the Council Vatican II.

At the basis of Dossetti's vision, there was the idea that the Church had opposed modernity from the Counter-Reformation and the Council of Trento onwards—taking side with the forces of the 'reaction' ever since, and eventually with Fascism in the interwar period—because of a theological deficiency, an 'error' in the tradition that the Church itself had not been able to overcome. The Church's *ralliement* with Fascism had been only the obvious outcomes of a long process. Hence the need for a theological, institutional, and structural reform of the Church—and the hopes, expectations, and commitment Dossetti put into the Vatican II.

Del Noce did not espouse Dossetti's repulsion if not disgust for liberalism, his critique of Tradition, his analysis of Fascism as the consequence of trends and problems that belonged to the *longue durée* of the Italian history—including the history of the Church—nor his hope that Communists would abandon progressively the atheistic 'super-structure.'

Del Noce rather tried to understand the deeper roots of Dossetti's diagnosis, going back to its origins—that is, the atmosphere of the Università Cattolica (Milan) in the interwar period, where Dossetti and his collaborators had studied and worked. This environment, said Del Noce in the 1980s, was deeply influenced by an anti-Liberal worldview.^{xv} In 1957, Del Noce defined the attitude of Dossetti towards liberalism as a

‘tragic integralism,’ which ends up accepting the Marxist reading of modernity and reduce liberalism, in the same guise of Marxism, as a sheer ideology of the bourgeoisie.^{xvi}

Compared to Dossetti, Del Noce remained at the margin of the mainstream ‘secular’ scene of Italian contemporary philosophy, but also became a relatively isolated figure within Catholic politics.^{xvii} Wide sections of the Catholic and Christian Democratic intellectual milieu endorsed a marriage between Catholics and Marxists, sustaining the opening to the Left in the 1960s (the alliance between the DC and the Socialist party), and the historical compromise between the DC and the Italian Communist Party in the 1970s, when the Communists, without holding ministerial posts, were included in the ‘government area’ (which meant to vote in favour of the government, or at least not against).

In this process, Del Noce thought, Christian Democracy lost its religious-ideological character more and more, becoming a party of democracy without an adjective, an ‘Americanized’ DC. In short, Catholics and Christian Democrats had accepted modernity on its own terms, therefore also embracing an interpretative framework based on the false dichotomies of progress-conservation, revolution-reaction, or Left-Right. A political interpretation of history had replaced a religious interpretation of history based on the traditional category of ‘Truth-Falsehood (or Good-Evil). ‘Il Santo’ had turned into ‘the Progressist’; whereas ‘the sinner’ had become ‘the reactionary.’ Catholics had accepted a category of the modern that was void of religious substance. To the ‘average Catholic,’ the enemy was no longer irreligion, atheism, or the blasphemous, but the ‘integralist’: a Catholic who wants to be Catholic until the end, living his/her faith as a perspective and guide for his/her life, and not as a weak and vague feeling. As such, the DC was unable to understand that its ideal mission had to be articulated against its third and perhaps more insidious enemy after Fascism and Communism: the ‘opulent society,’ or Western irreligion, which just as Fascism and Communism remained the

product if not in fact the culmination of modernity. It was against this enemy that the defense of a religious spirit and the re-discovery of Catholic tradition as a way of interpreting the present would stand its real test.

While Del Noce's political career brought him limited fame and only partial recognition, his academic curriculum amply justifies his position as one of Italy's leading intellectuals in the twentieth century. His reflections on modernity, rationalism, faith, democracy and human dignity found expression in a rich body of work comprising more than twenty books and a literal wealth of articles and essays.

In 1946 he published two essays on Marx which included an extended discussion of the place of atheism in Marx's philosophy. His works on Marx were part of a lifelong interest in the role of atheism in the history of modern philosophy, which culminated in 1964 in his *magnum opus*, *The Problem of Atheism*. In 1965 he also published a key monographic work *Catholic Reformation and Modern Philosophy*, vol. 1: *Descartes*.

In 1966 Del Noce was appointed Professor of History of Modern and Contemporary Philosophy at the University of Trieste. In 1970 he transferred to the University of Rome *La Sapienza* where he was appointed Professor of History of Political Doctrines and from 1974 Professor of Political Philosophy. He lived the rest of his life in Rome. During the political turmoil and growing left-wing influence (also among his own student body) of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Del Noce's continued his focus on atheism by taking up the wider theme of secularization and contemporary history. Some of his essays from this period were published in the 1970 volume *The Age of Secularization*, a work that in many ways anticipated arguments about the secular age later made by Anglo-Saxon scholars such as Charles Taylor.^{xviii} Del Noce also returned to the question of the relationship between Catholics and Marxists, as in his book from 1981 *The Catholic-Communist. The Suicide of the Revolution* from 1978 remained one of his most famous and controversial works, in which he accurately predicted the implosion of Communism,

provocatively arguing that the process of dissolution of Marxism into neo-bourgeois nihilism was already at work in the thought of Gramsci. In his final years Del Noce became a rather famous public intellectual, launching a journal, writing numerous articles in newspapers and weekly magazines, and continuously engaging public political debates as the ‘thinker’ of *Comunione e Liberazione*, the Catholic movement he believed would re-awaken the Catholic spirit and tradition within the DC and within Italian politics and society as a whole. This engagement culminated in his late-age serving as an ‘independent’ senator (1984-1987) for DC.

After Fascism: Augusto Del Noce and Jacques Maritain

Jacques Maritain is easily the most important of a number of European Catholic thinkers who had led the way in embracing at least some aspects of modernity as indispensable for a Catholic world-view. Maritain had been close to the quasi-fascist *Action Française* in the 1920s, but had abandoned the movement when it was condemned by the Vatican in 1926. Working within a neo-Thomist philosophical framework, in the mid-1930s he started to embrace human rights and modern democracy. In particular, *Humanisme Intégrale* (1936) and his 1942 pamphlet *Christianisme et Démocratie*—which was dropped by Allied plans over Europe—constituted a cautious, but nevertheless decisive endorsement of the ultimately Christian nature of democracy. As Maritain put it,

the important thing for the political life of the world and for the solution of the crisis of civilization is by no means to pretend that Christianity is linked to democracy and that Christian faith compels every believer to be a democrat; it is to affirm that democracy is linked to Christianity and that the democratic impulse has arisen in human history as the moral manifestation of the inspiration of the Gospel.^{xix}

Maritain argued that democracy, properly understood, represents the best form of government, e.g. the system of government most in keeping with the Christian understanding of the human ‘person’ and society and through which the demands of the common good can receive their most complete realization. Central to Maritain’s approach to democracy is the concept of the ‘person’ and its opposition to the ‘individual.’^{xxx} The ‘person’ has a spiritual and transcendent nature and a concern for the good of all; it flourishes only within a community and when open to God. The ‘individual’ is the material pole of the human being—the *self*, the life contained within the singular living thing (*bios*), the center for the experience of pleasure and the acquisition of material goods. For Maritain and his followers the ‘person,’ as opposed to the isolated ‘individual,’ always realizing him-herself in a community, while retaining a spiritual dimension that never can be absorbed into the politics of this world.

Consequently, Maritain wanted to realize his version of a ‘theo-centric’ humanism within the bounds of a pluralist and personalist democracy, by seeking to do justice to ‘man in the wholeness of his natural and supernatural being.’^{xxxi} But ‘theo-centric’ did not mean theocratic: Maritain insisted that ‘a new Christian temporal order, while founded on the same principles (analogically speaking) as that of the Middle Ages, will imply a *secular Christian*, not a consecrated conception of the temporal order.’^{xxii} ‘In speaking of a new Christendom,’ Maritain wrote, ‘I am ... speaking of a temporal system or age of civilization whose animating form will be Christian and which will correspond to the historical climate of the epoch on whose threshold we are.’^{xxiii} According to Maritain, the principles of medieval Christianity can persist in a modern, pluralistic culture, but only while aware of the concrete historical context of modernity. Maritain described this form of Christendom as a ‘Christianly secular conception of the temporal order,’^{xxiv} opposed to both the individualist-liberal and communalist-communist-fascist-totalitarian conceptions

of the social order, on the one hand, and the *Sacrum Imperium* model of the Middle Ages on the other hand.

Del Noce was deeply influenced by Maritain.^{xxv} In 1943 he stated very explicitly that his position was that of Maritain, ‘the only possible salvation of the modern world.’^{xxvi} As he himself recalled in a 1984 interview, he had read *Humanisme Intégrale* in full in French already in 1936, the year of its publication.^{xxvii} 1936 was the year of the Italian war against Ethiopia, the event that marked the period of maximum consensus to the regime.^{xxviii} Del Noce, instead, felt a sense of utter disgust and moral opposition to Mussolini and Fascism, which he regarded merely as a reign of violence, a brute force with no foundation in justice.^{xxix} This opposition found in Aldo Capitini—the future organizer of the peace marches from Perugia to Assisi, whom Del Noce met in Assisi in 1935—an important political, philosophical and existential point of reference.^{xxx}

Maritain’s *magnum opus* made the conceptual incompatibility between Catholicism and totalitarianism clear to Del Noce, serving as a powerful antidote to clerico-fascism. It freed Catholics from the medievalist, anti-modern utopia that drove many of them to adhere to Fascism, understood wrongly as a valuable ally in the fight against modernity and for the Catholic regeneration of Italy. Fascism was not a reaction against modernity, but a consequence of modernity—a consequence of the attempt at erasing God from history (secularism and atheism), replacing God and religion with politics, with secular cult. It was not a mistake against the culture of the modern, but a mistake within that culture.

Maritain inspired Del Noce’s search of a different relationship between politics and religion. Maritain was the thinker who rid Del Noce (and many other Catholics) of the ‘Benedetto Croce complex.’ According to Croce, Catholics, *qua* Catholics, inherently and intrinsically could not be liberal and anti-fascist. Following Maritain, Del Noce argued,

on the contrary, that only a religious (Catholic) perspective could safeguard freedom and human rights:

It is Catholicism, whatever Croce may think, that nowadays pushes Catholics to act in politics not only as defenders of their own freedom but also as defenders of everybody else's spiritual freedom, and to see any political and social problem through the prism of liberty.^{xxxix}

Drawing on Maritain, Del Noce pinned down the distinction between Christianity and Christendom, between faith and its (always contingent) historical-political embodiment, between the City of God and the City of Man. The goal was to substitute the model of the medieval *Sacrum Imperium* built by Charlemagne, with a new realm to be built in the present and enlivened by the yeast of the Gospel, safeguarding truth and freedom, and eventually espousing every possible clerical-authoritarianism. For Maritain as for Del Noce, in the modernity that established after the wars of religion and the split of the Church, one can no longer assume faith as an 'a priori,' as a shared paradigm already settled and peacefully accepted. In the modern age truth can and must be sought and proposed in freedom. This conviction was the key point that lied at the origin of Del Noce's 'critical legitimation of the modern.'^{xxxix} And indeed, in his writings between 1943 and 1946, there are statements that anticipate the conclusions of Vatican II on religious freedom, as then defended, among others, by the young Joseph Ratzinger.

It is also significant that Del Noce put his affirmations in a perspective that takes up Saint Augustine. Boldly, and insisting here in his quarrel against Croce, Del Noce claimed that the 'justification' and 'glorification' of 'the principle of liberty' is 'implicit in the Catholic theology of Grace.' The distinction between politics and religion and between theology and philosophy faded away. This discussion is not completely

accessible to anyone not familiar with theological concepts, and may make little sense to secular or non-religious thinkers, politicians, and readers of today; yet, it is crucial to understand how a religious perspective, rooted in Augustinian teaching, could become meaningful, indeed essential for the search of a different liberty after (and against) Fascism. The Catholic theology of Grace sees the freedom of man as ‘a value so sacred’ that ‘God Himself respects it, urging for it yet without imposing it.’ Conversely, the same cannot be said about the political liberalism and the ‘religion of liberty’ that Croce professed; and in his confrontation with the liberal doctrine, Del Noce here raised the stakes, reclaiming—at the level of foundations—the core value of freedom:

If liberty is the law of history, nobody can rise up against it; even the worst despot will be, in his own way, a servant of liberty. Liberty as understood by political liberalism cannot be but an endangered liberty. Why else would the need to claim and defend it arise? Conversely, from where could a menace to liberty linked to the absolute spirit come? I suspect that behind the Crocean ‘religion of liberty’ we do not find the philosophical consciousness of political liberalism, but the further theologization of a political movement with different origins.^{xxxiii}

If liberty (as well as faith) is the working of grace, then it cannot be imposed in a coercive form. The priority of grace leads to the recognition of the irreplaceable import of freedom, also in a political sense. Hence the superiority of democracy conceived, along with Capitini and following Maritain, as a locus of persuasion and non-violence, as a system not based on ‘the majority rule’ but on ‘the respect for the single person’ and his/her liberty. Democracy is ‘a regime which prevents everybody from acting upon

others if not through means of persuasion,’ and ‘a regime in which any subject is considered as subject of persuasion, that is, a *person*.’^{xxxiv}

Del Noce’s conceptual and literal debt from Maritain is strong on this point. The new Italian post-Fascist democracy could not be the liberal democracy cherished by Croce, which had already proved too weak to oppose and resist Fascism in the early 1920s. A true alternative must therefore come from an ‘integral,’ ‘personalist’ democracy where the ‘method of liberty’ and ‘respect for other persons’ must become ‘foundational values.’^{xxxv} The only political force which could build a ‘personalist’ democracy was Christian Democracy, the only party whose conceptions and philosophy was based on the ‘person’ and its openness to God and to transcendence, well beyond the limits and constraints of the liberal conception ‘that posits as its final aim ... the individual in its simple aspect of bare existence.’^{xxxvi}

In this lies the political power of political Catholicism and the paramount role of Christian Democracy in post-totalitarian Italy—in fact, as Del Noce indicates, in a post-totalitarian age writ large:

The political relevance of Christianity today lies in claiming the presence of a spiritual principle independent from society intrinsic to the human being. It is here and only here, that we find the rationale for a Christian party, also as the only way to avoid totalitarianisms. The liberal function resides today with Christianity; and I think that also the liberal party can only assert its ideals by recognizing its Christian core; a signal of this is the insistence on the dissociation of the principle of liberty, as a value of the person, from economic liberalism.^{xxxvii}

In the specific context of post-war Italy—with the new republican Constitution, and the first parliamentary elections of 1948—the Christian Democratic project formulated by De Gasperi was for Del Noce the most complete and fitting embodiment of the philosophical-cum-political platform outlined in his writings. What Del Noce later (in an important article from 1957) would define as ‘*degasperismo*,’ was the idea that the liberal ‘function’ in postwar Italy belonged to political Catholicism, a ‘non-laic liberalism,’ (opposed to Croce’s liberalism pervaded by immanentism), yet ‘not therefore less liberal.’ The strongest point of *degasperismo* was a proper understanding of totalitarianism: the idea that the experience of totalitarianism was indispensable toward detaching political Catholicism from clericalism, forcing it to re-discover ‘the original Christian nucleus of the concept of liberty.’^{xxxviii} As Del Noce saw the situation in the 1940s, to inject the Christian Democratic project with oxygen—and to give theoretical shape to De Gasperi’s project—it was necessary to move beyond the schismatic counter-positioning of reactionary fundamentalism, medievalism and anti-modernity and its mirror image of nineteenth century modernism. From this predicament his philosophical trajectory took shape, the contents of which we now need to engage in some more detail.

Del Noce and Modernity Twice Born

The framework of modern thought which Del Noce tried to find an alternative to was the scheme codified by Hegel and idealism and taken over by Marxism, with tenets shared even by Thomistic neo-Scholasticism. According to this dominant narrative, modernity was a period of secularization in which the emancipation and freedom of the human being moved in tandem with the estrangement from God and faith. Between 1954 and 1958 Del Noce turned this perspective on its head by recognizing the modernity is not ‘single,’ but rather ‘double.’^{xxxix} Driving thus a wedge into the heart and

twilight of the modern project, Del Noce cleared an opening from which the modern could be reconfigured and set back on track. The argument goes as follows:

From Descartes follows the strand of rationalism and atheism culminating through the Enlightenment in Hegel and Marx, and in Italy in Gentile's Idealism and 'Attualism.' Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy might be seen as the alternative, if not the opposite, of Hegel. Yet, according to Del Noce, Nietzsche rather pushes Hegel's philosophy to the extreme, translating the Hegelian radical immanentism into a professed and explicit atheism. Thus, Hegel's rationalism and Nietzsche's irrationalism as well as Gentile's spiritualism expressed the very same 'larger rupture represented by modernity,' where 'the transcendence epitomized as a beyond becomes replaced by an intra-mundane transcendence'; in the end the 'removal of the supernatural can lead in various directions,'^{xli} but this does not mean that any such direction carries its own positivity, nor that it represents a genuine alternative.

Against the French-German line of thought (Descartes-Hegel-Marx-Nietzsche), Del Noce retrieved an alternative French-Italian line of interpretation, the line of 'ontologism'. Del Noce understood this alternative as 'the theory which says that the knowing of God, by a (vision) of an a priori intuition, is the condition that makes possible any knowledge,'^{xlii} which alone can guarantee the safeguard of Divine transcendence and the establishment of a Christian philosophy. Such a genealogy begins from the very same point of departure as the French-German narrative: Descartes. Having 'dealt' with Liberalism and Marxism in the immediate post-war period, this explains his extensive focus on Descartes in the period that followed. Del Noce sees the possibility of a different 'Cartesianism,' an Augustinian, Christian-modern stand, which passes from Pascal, Malebranche and Vico to Gioberti, and culminates in Antonio Rosmini, the thinker in whom Catholicism and freedom found their synthesis and which for Del Noce represents the very zenith of Italian philosophy.^{xliii}

The crucial transition figure here is Malebranche, the focus of Del Noce's doctoral thesis. Malebranche is widely considered the father of modern ontologism, whose influence on Vico and on subsequent Italian philosophy Del Noce considered huge, even if overlooked by philosophical historiography and especially by Gentile. In this way, 'the line from Descartes to Rosmini has been silenced, rendering it impossible to understand Rosminian thought properly.'^{xliii}

The French-Italian Descartes-Malebranche-Rosmini genealogy expresses a personalist interpretation of the modern, which links human freedom to the existence of God, as opposed to the Spinozan-Hegelian line, in which pantheism and atheism culminate in political totalitarianism. Soviet Marxism, Fascism and Nazism are seen as the historical-political consequences of modern rationalism, atheism, and secularization; as such they represent not only the loss of importance of the Sacred in twentieth century culture, but a wider and deeper transformation of the Sacred into the *saeculum*. Hence, totalitarianisms are the violent and tragic attempts at a 'sacralization of politics,' raising from 'cultural climates pregnant with political sacrality and political theology'^{xliv}; expressions of a political perfectionism^{slv} which considers Evil ('il Male'), or the presence of Evil in history, as a 'consequence of society' and not constitutive of human nature, and therefore (allegedly) open to elimination.^{slvi} Marxism is the final historical-political pathological fulfillment of modern rationalism, and the final stage of German philosophy: the transition from the Idealistic Hegelian Immanentism to the Historical Materialism and Mass Atheism. Del Noce writes:

Marxism present itself as the agent that realizes the program of modern philosophy, understood as a combination of rationalism (denial of the supernatural) and a completely secular Christian anthropology that affirms

the dominion of man over nature; in short, and coinciding with these two conditions, as a radical humanism.^{xlvii}

There is no space in Del Noce for the idea of Marxism as a Christian heresy (as Maritain maintained), or as a secular 'heir' of Hebrew-Messianism (as in Löwith's philosophy).^{xlviii} Marxism is the point of arrival of the first modernity, of so-called rationalism, being the most concrete and complete attempt of rationalism, freedom and liberty as a historical experiment that excludes any form of dependency.

However, the tradition leading from the Cartesian concept of freedom to atheistic Marxist freedom and rationalistic autonomy of reason is based on a misunderstanding of Descartes' concept of freedom, deriving mostly from a lack of contextualization of his thought and to be ascribed to developments in seventeenth century philosophical debate. Descartes' concept of human freedom is not absolute freedom, as in the Marxist perspective. Descartes responded to the cultural crisis of his time, and his polemical target was the skepticism of the libertines.

The kind of certainty assured by the argument of the *cogito* is a polemical certainty against skepticism. Because of the collapse of Aristotelian physics, the skepticism of the libertines was trying to assert the total collapse of any interpretation of the world whatsoever, that is, the dissolution of the idea of truth itself. In this context Descartes should be interpreted in the light of Augustinian thought (*contra academicos*). Descartes constructs a 'metaphysic' of the subject by abandoning the problem of the complex, hierarchical, qualitative Aristotelian structure of the world. This 'Catholic' interpretation of Descartes,^{xlix} again indebted to Maritain,¹ does not go so far as to deny that there are no elements in Descartes' *cogito* to justify the line of thought of the first modernity. Nevertheless, this interpretation maintains that Descartes is not historiographically reducible to the idea of Cartesianism functional in the first modernity, and it opens up,

philosophically, alternative concepts of modernity: in other words, a reconfigured modernity open to transcendence and to Christianity.

Augusto Del Noce and the Conflictual Relationship with Christian Democracy

At the philosophical level, one could argue that Del Noce had successfully installed a theoretical platform for modern society, opposing the main competing –isms, Catholic anti-modern fundamentalism, as well as the ghosts of twentieth century totalitarianism in all their shades, helping to launch Christian Democracy, understood as a new liberalism of Christian inspiration (or, in Del Noce’s words, *degasperismo*), into the second half of the twentieth century.

To Del Noce’s great disappointment, by the end of the 1950s the political culture of Christian Democracy was taking a rather different turn, much more influenced by the Leftist currents within catholic thought and Dossetti’s interpretation of the role of Church and Christian ethics within this-worldly politics. After the death of De Gasperi (1954), Christian Democrats had increasingly drifted away from *degasperismo*. What Del Noce defined as ‘Catholic progressivism,’ flourishing under the banner of the Christian Left or *catto-comunismo*, was re-emerging as a powerful alternative and the successor of the DC lead by De Gasperi.^{li} According to Del Noce, ‘Catholic progressivism’ aimed at accepting some elements and features of Marxism, proving them ‘true’ in undesirable ways. To Del Noce Marxism could not be partitioned in healthy and rotten components but must be wholly refused.

The ‘progressive Catholic,’ Del Noce argued, absorbs and assumes, more or less consciously, the typical attitudes of the revolutionary thought: the devaluation of the principles of liberty in favor of the principle of equality; the endorsement of what Rosmini called ‘perfectionism’; the devaluation of the past (thus the detachment from tradition) and the divinization of the future; the need to consider the original sin as a

disposable residual, and the reduction of the individual to his/her social relation. Del Noce's critique of 'Catholic progressivism' was primarily a critique of the concept and practice of Revolution and its anthropological and moral repercussions. To the concept of Revolution he opposed the concept of Reform, or better, the concept of *Risorgimento*, which implies a completely different attitude toward reality. Whereas the Revolution dictated a never-ending transmutation of values and a complete destruction of tradition, the *Risorgimento* took off from the belief that there were permanent principles and values which, facing new problems and new enemies, must be brought to life again and developed appropriately.^{lii}

At the party-institutional level, the post-De Gasperi Christian Democracy led by Amintore Fanfani and Aldo Moro was moving, despite the opposition of the party's internal wings and sectors of the Vatican, toward an opening to the Left. Del Noce was rather skeptical. To be sure, Italian Socialism had freed itself from the ballast of Leninism and begun a revision of Marxism. Yet, socialism still seemed to Del Noce a populist void, a government formula without ideal cohesiveness. A marriage between Christian Democracy and Socialism would be dominated by a politics of public expenditure and weakness vis-à-vis corporatist pressures. A political constellation not founded on ideological clarity would always end up in demagoguery and functionalism.^{liii}

Italian Socialism was moved by an ideological perspective defined by Del Noce as 'positivistic'. The cultural backdrop of the opening of the Left, Del Noce thus argued, would not be Christian or religious but radically secular. Quite likely, the consequence of all this would be a wild modernization of habits, customs, and culture which would endanger traditional values.^{liv}

In the 1963 congress of San Pellegrino—the third of a series of meetings where Christian Democratic intellectuals and politicians met and discussed the opening to the Left—Del Noce gave a talk, 'The ideological power of Marxism.' He argued that the

alliance with Socialists and Catholics had affirmed socialist values over liberal ones, leading to an irreversible rupture with the original ideas of don Sturzo and De Gasperi.^{lv}

The Opulent Society and the Encounter with Voegelin

By the mid-1960s, however, Del Noce's philosophical trajectory also started to evolve in different directions, outside the primary battlefield of political ideologies. Del Noce realized that a new society was gaining momentum—a society that no longer needed religious forces to oppose Communism, a 'post-Marxist' era, a time when the relativizing of every ideal would blend with a technocratic vision of the world.^{lvi} The end of totalitarianism, the crisis and the fall of Marxism and its Soviet embodiment petered out the 'sacral' period of secularization, the period when politics would become the Sacred and absorb the ideal of otherworldly Redemption.

Crucially, in the mid-1960s Del Noce also discovered the work of political theorist Eric Voegelin, who was the first thinker to pluralize modernity. It was Del Noce who introduced Voegelin to the Italian academic audience. Voegelin's *The New Science of Politics* was published in Italian by Borla in 1968, translated by Renato Pavetto, and with an introduction authored by Del Noce that carried the indicative title, 'Eric Voegelin and The Critique of the Idea of Modernity.'^{lvii} Drawing on Voegelin, Del Noce now, and in his following writings of the 1970s and 1980s, advanced the idea that atheism is not (or not only) the eventual outcome of modern rationalism, but the consequence of a 'gnosis' equivalent to secularization, and based on the theology of Joachim of Flora. As Del Noce writes in the 1968 introduction to *The New Science of Politics*: 'the evolution of the spirit of modernity coincides with the evolution of the spirit of gnosticism.'^{lviii}

Del Noce agreed with Voegelin on the absolute centrality and prominence in modernity of the category of 'history.' In this vein, modernity enacts an immanentization of the Christian *eschaton*: the human being, through the discovery and unveiling of the law

of history (such as Marx and Engels's *diamat*) can redeem him/herself in the intra-mundane sphere. Furthermore, Del Noce agreed with Voegelin on totalitarianism (and Marxism above all) as the 'divieto di fare domande' ('prohibition to ask questions', Voegelin's *frageverbot*^{lx}), a modern form and expression of gnosis—that is, a political project that proposes a human self-redemption and salvation that is entirely historical and intra-mundane, forgetting the constitutive finitude of humanity.^{lx}

Inspired by Voegelin, Del Noce argued that the twentieth century had now entered into a new 'profane' period of secularization, marked by 'irreligiosità naturale' ('natural irreligiosity'), a new form of totalitarianism: the 'società opulenta' ('opulent society'),^{lxi} technocratic, nihilist, scientist, relativist, individualist, marked by the primacy of instrumental reason, *more irreligious* than Communist atheism, victorious on the very battleground of Communism itself, that of materialism. The 'opulent society' is the triumph of western irreligion,

a society that accepts every Marxist 'negation' regarding the denial of religion, metaphysics, and contemplative thought; that therefore accepts the Marxist reduction of ideas to an instrument of production; but that on the other hand refutes Marxism its messianic revolutionary aspects, i.e. the only religious remain of the revolutionary idea ... [the opulent society] represents the Bourgeois spirit in its pure state, the Bourgeois spirit that has triumphed over its traditional opponents, transcendent religion and revolutionary thought.^{lxii}

In the end, Marxism had served nihilism and the bourgeois spirit. Marxism broke any link with tradition, but had no elements with which to affirm a new dimension of

reality, to replace Tradition; the ultimate effect of Marxism is the bourgeois society, opulent, rich, 'fat,' a society that inhibits questioning and searching for meaning.

Within an 'opulent' society, democracy becomes another form of relativism; being a democrat means not to believe in the existence of truth. Democracy in this sense counters Marxist Gnosticism with its own agnosticism; it still equals a frightening loss of standards and an existential loss of meaning, a negation not only of the human person in his integrity but also of the very Socratic-Platonic idea of *politics* as that glue which ties together human beings in a meaningful order.

Contrary to an 'opulent society' opposition to Marxism (an economic and technical opposition), a religious opposition to Marxism is based on the recognition of the dignity of human person, and it does not renounce the idea of truth, but remains rooted in it. The respect for human conscience and human freedom is an absolute truth on which democracy can and must be based. The agnostic form of democracy, by fearing and excluding the force of truth and right, ends up recognizing only the truth and the right of force. In this way, Western irreligion goes beyond Gnostic Marxism because it is more radically irreligious and supersedes the incomplete materialism of Marxism by denying the idea of salvation and liberation altogether. This leads to a new form of totalitarianism, of the domination of opinion and the whims of the strong, which needs no form of legitimation, no cover up of power with ideology, because the only difference among opinions owes to the strength or popularity of their holders. The reference to a future truth or to a desire for liberation is eradicated. An agnostic conservative defense of freedom is impotent with regard to this tyrannical outcome and the dissolution of truth and right. The idea of the person and his or her rights (that grounds even the liberal right to private property), assumes a metaphysics which has been abolished.

The relativity of Western irreligion, which prepares the way for a totalitarianism more powerful and consistent than Communism (or a Marxism without any promise of future revolution), is the suicide of democracy.

This was the dramatic situation for Italian and European culture, as diagnosed by Del Noce. The crisis of Marxism—which was to find an unexpected revival after the events of 1968—posited a conceptual return of the *pari*, a Pascal's wager: at the very moment in which atheism was losing its scientific guise, the possibility of a revival of the religious option looked relevant. Perhaps, Del Noce argued, the crisis of Italian and European culture can only be overcome by a renewal, a 'Risorgimento' based on a Christian philosophy and a conception of nature and the human being open to transcendence.

Rather disillusioned, this remained for Del Noce a matter of possibility, not necessarily an actuality. Del Noce glimpsed possibilities without being able to indicate positive outlets or clear-cut alternatives. Del Noce, in the end, never philosophically deduced the need for the religious option. Within the political realm, he ultimately found little reason for hope, as Christian Democracy had abandoned the potentiality of its endogenous principles, only to surrender to the lure of the contrasting ideologies of socialism and liberalism—and the unlikely blending of both under the protective umbrella of an impoverished 'Christian democracy.' Political Catholicism had abandoned its principles and was now indistinguishable from other political cultures and the anthropological void they represented. The triumph of the opulent society, and hence of western irreligion, was taking the wind out of any possible religious revival. These were, thus, conflicting dynamics that Del Noce could not resolve.

Del Noce and His Legacy: Reconsidering the Nexus between Christianity and Political Thought

Norberto Bobbio once defined Del Noce as ‘the Italian De Maistre.’^{lxiii} The sentence was not only infelicitous, but also substantially unfounded. To be sure, Del Noce knew De Maistre’s philosophy and admired his criticism of the revolutionary mentality. Yet, Del Noce was also highly critical of De Maistre and the whole reactionary-conservative thought, especially its defensive attitude which left it incapable to understand, in the framework of modern thought, the distinction between rationalism and freedom. To Del Noce, modernity contained indeed something positive: the idea of liberty. At the political level, Catholicism must meet this ideal. This was pivotal in the case of Italy where many Catholics had ended up supporting Fascism, and with the dominance of Christian Democracy in a post-totalitarian state. It was a necessary move, moreover, in a country where large segments of the population, Catholics included, had come to embrace Communism, and therefore were still under the spell of totalitarian thought.

Facing this historical-political situation, Del Noce argued that the correct way to answer the challenge posed by secularization is not by rejecting modernity altogether but by correcting it in light of the classical metaphysical tradition, which must be rediscovered, renewed and purified. Modernity needed to be brought back on a different track, and this could best be done from a philosophical platform that recognized the irreducible nature of transcendental experiences; in other words, for Del Noce it could best be done by turning to Christianity and the teachings of the Gospel, but from the reflexive stand point of the here and now.

This crucially speaks to a dimension which is problematically absent in the analysis provided by political theorists engaging with a democracy adjectivized by the ‘Christian’^{lxiv}: namely the theological substance and the idea of transcendence. Within a historical process, transcendence turned into something much more than an abstract

principle or a decorative device. In the experience of the thinker it rather emerged as a symbol and a new marker of certainty that could ground and direct the democratic experience and re-launch democracy after the horrors of totalitarianism, without simply reverting to a Liberal order which had proven itself defenseless against the threat of totalitarian regimes.

The interpretative opening up of ‘modernity’ was an important contribution whereby the reactionary position of political Catholicism was outdone, and whereby the encounter between Christianity and liberal and personalist democracy could finally find its legitimacy. Del Noce taught Catholics to be open to modern freedom as Catholics, no longer subjugated to contrasting worldview or ideologies alien to its own core. He also taught Catholics that Catholicism is original only when and if is not subaltern, when it does not start from an opposition to an adversary when defining itself. As he wrote in 1968, commenting on the student-led revolutions taking place, ‘the opposition to the opulent society cannot be conducted from the reactionary point of view, and that simply because the opposition of progressive and reactionary is internal to its language.’^{lxv}

Herein lies also Del Noce’s actuality; for evidently enough, the consumer society, this ‘opulent society’ that he confronted in his later writings, is still very much with us today—much more so than those ideological –isms and absolutisms that created so much havoc and caused so much human suffering in that political modernity ‘without restraints,’ as Voegelin called it. We might at least ask whether it is not this opulent consumerism, void of values and lacking in ontological underpinning that has affirmed itself and is spreading via that larger process now going under the name of globalization.

Del Noce saw that ultimately it was not Marxism that he needed to confront: it would collapse on its own. The real enemy to combat was the materialist consumerism of post-Marxism, energized by the return of Liberalism in its extreme form. Comte will

replace Marx; technocracy and blind belief in scientism and progress without limits will survive the collapse of socialist Utopias. But they all belong to the same genealogy.

Destiny wants that Del Noce died in the pivotal year of 1989, on December 30, on the second last day of that fatal decade, and just weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall which initiated the final collapse of Soviet Communism and paving the way for neo-Liberal global triumph. There might be an argument to make that Del Noce's thought and intellectual legacy must be placed in that particular historical period which started on the day of his death. Ours.

ⁱ A. Del Noce, *L'epoca della secolarizzazione* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1970).

ⁱⁱ A. Del Noce, *Il suicidio della rivoluzione* (Milan: Rusconi, 1978), p. 337.

ⁱⁱⁱ A. Del Noce, *Il problema ideologico dei cattolici italiani* (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1964); see also M. Borghesi, 'Il problema politico dei cattolici', in G. Ceci and L. Cedroni (Eds) *Filosofia e democrazia in Augusto Del Noce* (Rome: Cinque Lune, 1993), pp. 141-169.

^{iv} There is not even an entry on Del Noce in G. Moliterno, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Italian Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000).

^v Augusto Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, with an introduction by C. Lancellotti, translated by C. Lancellotti (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014).

^{vi} Analysis has primarily focused on twentieth-century conflicts among *secular* ideologies; for example see K. D. Bracher, *The Age of Ideologies: A History of Political Thought in the Twentieth Century*, tr. E. Osers (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994); M. Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1999); T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005). There is instead ample space dedicated to Catholic ideas and Christian Democracy in J.-W. Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011); see also P. Pombeni, 'The Ideology of Christian Democracy', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 5 (2000), pp. 289-300.

^{vii} In this vein see M. Conway, 'Christian Democracy: One Words or Two', *Historia y Religión*, 2012) <http://historiayreligion.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Christian-Democracy-MConway.pdf> (last accessed: 14 June 2015).

^{viii} M. Caciagli, 'Christian Democracy', in T. Ball and R. Bellamy (Eds) *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 165-190.

^{ix} Müller, *op. cit.*, Ref. 6, p. 138.

^x On this see also R. Buttiglione, *Augusto Del Noce. Biografia di un pensiero* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1991); G. F. Lami, *Introduzione ad Augusto Del Noce* (Rome: Pellicani, 1999). For bibliographic resources see Del Noce Foundation's website, <http://www.fondazioneaugustodelnoce.net/>

^{xi} On 1943 as a 'liminal' moment in Italian history, see R. Forlenza, 'Bewilderment and Re-composition: September 8, 1943 and the Liminal Origins of Italian Democracy', *International Political Anthropology*, 4 (2011), pp. 133-157.

^{xii} On this see B. Thomassen, ‘Anthropology, Multiple Modernities and the Axial Age Debates’, *Anthropological Theory*, 10 (2010), pp. 321-342

^{xiii} The Italian term ‘tatticismo’ carries negative connotations that are not implicit in its English translation.

^{xiv} P. Pombeni, *Giuseppe Dossetti. L'avventura politica di un riformatore cristiano* (Il Mulino: Bologna, 2013).

^{xv} A. Del Noce, *Il cattolico comunista* (Milan: Rusconi, 1981), pp. 149-151; see also A. Del Noce, ‘Intensità di una grande illusione (Dossetti e dossettismo)’, *Il Sabato*, 17 (27 April 1985).

^{xvi} A. Del Noce, ‘Totalitarismo e filosofia della storia’, *Il Mulino*, VI (1957), pp. 91-98.

^{xvii} On the confrontation between ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ thought within contemporary Italian philosophy see Maurizio Pagano, ‘Contemporary Italian Philosophy: The Confrontation between Religious and Secular Thought’, in S. Benso and B. Schroeder (Eds) *Contemporary Italian Philosophy: Crossing the Borders of Ethics, Politics and Religion*, tr. S. Benso (Albany, NY: Suny Press, 2007), pp. 1-13.

^{xviii} C. Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007).

^{xix} J. Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, tr. D. C. Anson (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius Press, 1943), p. 37.

^{xx} J. Maritain. *La personne et le bien commun* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1947).

^{xxi} J. Maritain, ‘Integral Humanism and the Crisis of Modern Times’, *The Review of Politics*, 1 (1939), pp. 1-17 (quote at p. 8).

^{xxii} J. Maritain, *True Humanism*, tr. M. R. Adamson (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1938), 156 (emphasis in original).

^{xxiii} *Ibid.*, 126.

^{xxiv} *Ibid.*

^{xxv} On this see M. Borghesi, ‘Democrazia e modernità in Augusto Del Noce (negli scritti dal 1930 al 1946)’, *30Giorni*, 22(10) (2004), pp. 1-24; T. Dell’Era, ‘Augusto Del Noce e Jacques Maritain: libertà e liberalismo.’ in C. Vasale and G. Dessì (Eds) *Augusto del Noce e la libertà: Incontri filosofici* (Turin: Sei, 1996), pp. 61-78; T. Dell’Era, *Augusto Del Noce. Filosofo della politica* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2000).

^{xxvi} See Del Noce’s diary entry of 6 December 1943, now in A. Del Noce, *Scritti Politici, 1930-1950*, T. Dell’Era (Ed.) (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2001), 182.

^{xxvii} M. Borghesi and L. Brunelli, 'Storia di un pensatore solitario (intervista con Augusto Del Noce)', *30Giorni*, 2(4) (1984), pp. 62-67. See also A. Del Noce, 'L'unità del pensiero di Jacques Maritain', *L'Europa* 7(7) (1973), pp. 77-86; A. Del Noce, 'L'umanesimo frainteso', *30Giorni*, 4(4) (1986), pp. 70-71; A. Del Noce, 'Maritain messo in congedo?', *Il Tempo*, 8 January 1987.

^{xxviii} R. De Felice. *Mussolini, il duce*, vol. 1: *Gli anni del consenso, 1929-1936* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974); A. Del Boca (Ed) *Le guerre coloniali del fascismo* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2008).

^{xxix} 'The war in Ethiopia... it was the emotion for that war that decisively made me an anti-Fascist'; A. Del Noce, 'Il ripensamento della storia italiana in Giacomo Noventa', introduction to *Tre parole sulla Resistenza e altri scritti di Giacomo Noventa* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1972), p. LXX; see also A. Del Noce, 'Genesi e significato della prima sinistra cattolica italiana', in *Modernismo, Fascismo, Comunismo. Aspetti e figure della cultura e della politica dei cattolici nel '900*, G. Rossini (Ed) (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1972), pp. 415-504 (esp. pp. 462-463).

^{xxx} In the 21 September 1943 entry of his diary Del Noce wrote: 'Principle of non-violence: Capitini, the man who converted me to anti-Fascism'; Del Noce, *op. cit.*, Ref. 26, p. 43. See also Borghesi and Brunelli, *op. cit.*, Ref. 27.

^{xxxi} See Del Noce's unedited manuscript 'Civiltà liberale e cattolicesimo' (probably 1946), now in Del Noce, *op. cit.*, Ref. 26, p. 458.

^{xxxii} M. Borghesi, *Augusto Del Noce. La legittimazione critica del moderno* (Genova: Marietti, 2011).

^{xxxiii} See 'Civiltà liberale e cattolicesimo', now in Del Noce, *op. cit.*, Ref. 26, pp. 456-457; see also Del Noce's unedited text 'Cattolici e liberali', now in Del Noce, *op. cit.*, Ref. 26, p. 463.

^{xxxiv} A. Del Noce, 'Il concetto di democrazia e il principio delle élites', *Il Popolo Nuovo*, 20-21 September 1945 (emphasis in the original); see also A. Del Noce, 'Analisi del linguaggio', *Il Popolo Nuovo*, 27 May 1945; and the unedited manuscripts 'Posizioni del cattolico' (1943) and 'Principi di politica cristiana' (1944-1945), now in Del Noce, *op. cit.*, Ref. 26, respectively pp. 184-186 and p. 226.

^{xxxv} A. Del Noce, 'Intorno all'obbligatorietà del voto', *Il Popolo Nuovo*, 23-24 August 1945.

^{xxxvi} See 'Della democrazia' (1945), unpublished manuscript now in Del Noce *op. cit.*, Ref. 26, p. 61. See also 'Cattolici e comunisti,' text for a conference given in Mondovì (March 1944), previously unpublished, now in Del Noce, *op. cit.*, Ref. 26, pp. 199-201.

^{xxxvii} A. Del Noce, 'Problemi della democrazia', *Il Popolo Nuovo*, 9-10 December 1945; A. Del Noce, 'Politicità del cristianesimo oggi', *Costume*, 2(1) (1946), pp. 59-68.

xxxviii A. Del Noce, 'Fine o crisi del degasperismo?', *Il Mulino*, VI (1957), pp. 479-485.

xxxix On this see also Borghesi, *op. cit.*, Ref. 32, pp. 144-164, and F. Barone (Ed), *Augusto Del Noce e il problema della modernità* (Rome: Studium, 1995).

xl See A. Del Noce, 'L'idea di modernità' (1982), now in A. Del Noce, *Modernità. Interpretazione transpolitica della storia contemporanea*, G. Riconda (Ed) (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2007), pp. 33-58 (quotes at pp. 43 and 35). We cannot discuss here Del Noce's very crucial reading of Gentile. In short, despite its veneer of 'tradition' and reference to interiority, spirituality and Risorgimento, the philosophy of Gentile is, for Del Noce, 'the most complete negation of eternal ideas, norms, and timeless truth ... any value now refers to an act that has become synonymus with "energy," with "force"; the theological language only conceals the Nietzschean will to power ; A. Del Noce, *Il suicidio della rivoluzione* (Milan: Rusconi, 1978), p. 350.

xli A. Del Noce, 'Ontologismo' (1968-1969), in *Enciclopedia Filosofica*, vol. VIII (Milan: Bompiani, 2006), pp. 8147-8153 (quote at p. 8147).

xlii A. Del Noce, *Da Cartesio a Rosmini. Scritti vari, anche inediti, di filosofia e storia della filosofia*, F. Mercadante and B. Casadei (Eds) (Milan: Giuffrè, 1991)

xliii A Del Noce, *Giovanni Gentile. Per una interpretazione filosofica della storia contemporanea* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990), p. 5. One of the most crucial consequences of this is that Gentile wrongly interpreted Gioberti philosophy as forerunner for actualism, and wrongly immanentized the religious thought of the Risorgimento.

xliv A. Del Noce, *Il problema dell'ateismo* (1964), with an introduction by N. Matteucci, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990), p. 297.

xlv Del Noce draws on Rosmini's notion of 'political perfectionism,' that is, 'the system which considers perfection in human affairs possibile and which sacrifice the present good to the future imagined perfection'; A. Rosmini, *Filosofia della politica* (1839), S. Cotta (Ed) (Milan: Rusconi, 1985), p. 137.

xlvi A. Del Noce, 'Tradizione e Rivoluzione', in *Tradizione e Rivoluzione*, Atti del XXVII convegno del centro di studi filosofici tra professori universitari, Gallarate 1972 (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1973), pp. 23-28 and 39-53 (quote at p. 49).

xlvii Del Noce, *op. cit.*, Ref. 44, p. 238.

xlviii Del Noce writes: 'In fact, Marxism preserves Messianism in light of its historicism, with a stance that wants to preserve what was valid in the past; however, in the process leading to the "atheist religion" there is no *residual* or *ferment* of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Atheism serves as a mediator between two

conceptions denying this tradition in its first assertion – the idea of the dialectic, linked to the mortality of the finite and to the Hegelian reversal of the theme of sin, and the idea of Revolution. To interpret Marxism, for its “theological” aspect of its philosophy of history, as a messianic transfiguration of Hegelianism, and not as a logical-rational process that brings Hegelism to its consequential extreme, represents in my view an extreme misunderstanding; Del Noce, *Ibid.*, p. 64 (note 57), emphasis in original.

^{xlix} A. Del Noce, *Riforma cattolica e filosofia moderna*, vol. I: *Cartesio* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1965).

ⁱ For Maritain’s reading of Descartes see J. Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes, together with some other essays*, tr. M. L. Anderson (New York: Philosophical Library, 1944); J. Maritain, *The Range of Reason* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1953). For a related discussion of Descartes see B. Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 120-126 .

ⁱⁱ Del Noce had not been completely indifferent to ‘Catholic progressivism’ in the years of the war. Between 1942 and 1943, thanks also to the encounter with the Catholic-Comunist Franco Rodano, Del Noce was attracted by Marxism and by the Italian Christian Left: ‘Marx rightly understood that religion was impossible in bourgeois society; this, and only this, is the point of agreement between a Catholic and a Marxist’; see ‘Pensieri per un saggio sulla categoria di schiavitù’ (1943) now in Del Noce, *op. cit.*, Ref. 26, p. 178. On the relationship between Del Noce and Rodano from the 1940s to the late 1970s, and Del Noce’s criticism of Rodano see Del Noce, *op. cit.*, Ref. 15.

ⁱⁱⁱ A. Del Noce, ‘Pensiero cristiano e comunismo: “inveramento” o “risposta a sfida”?’ *Il Mulino*, VII (1958), pp. 307-318. The idea of a ‘Risorgimento filosofico’ or a Risorgimento as a philosophical category is of the most crucial importance in Del Noce’s thought, a kind of creative restoration pitted against both the utopian revolution aiming at destroying traditional values and the reactionary restoration aiming at the sheer return to the past; see A. Del Noce, ‘Rosmini e la categoria filosofica-politica di Risorgimento’ (1983), www.cattedrarosmini.org (last accessed: 2 June 2015).

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Del Noce, *op. cit.*, Ref. 38, p. 485. For Del Noce’s critique of the DC after De Gasperi see A. Del Noce, ‘Fanfani: il politico dell’Università Cattolica’, *Il Mulino*, IX (1960), pp. 81-89.

^{lv} A. Del Noce, ‘Ideologia socialista e fronte popolare’, *L’Ordine Civile*, I (3), 25 July 1959, pp. 1-3.

^{lvi} A. Del Noce, ‘La potenza ideologica del marxismo e la possibilità del successo del comunismo in Italia per via democratica’, in A. Del Noce, *I cattolici e il progressismo*, with a preface by R. Buttiglione, B. Casadei (Ed) (Milan: Mondadori 1994), pp. 45-92.

^{lvii} Interestingly enough, it was this perspective that enabled del Noce, in 1975, to prize Pier Paolo Pasolini as the most lucid interpreter of the new totalitarianism of dissolution.

^{lvii} E. Voegelin, *La Nuova Scienza della Politica*, tr. R. Pavetto, with an introduction by A. Del Noce (Turin: Borla, 1968). The book, which collected Voegelin's Walgreen Lectures at the University of Chicago, was first published in 1952. On Del Noce and Voegelin see P. Armellini, 'Del Noce lettore di Voegelin: la critica della modernità', in G. F. Lami *Lo Stato degli studi voegeliniani: a cinquant'anni da Ordine e Storia*, edited by G. F. Lami. Milan: Franco Angeli, 2011), pp. 215-248; G. F. Lami, 'Dall'idea di modernità all'idea di gnosi', in G. F. Lami (Ed.) *Filosofi cattolici del Novecento: La tradizione in Augusto Del Noce* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2009), pp. 111-121; see also Bjørn Thomassen and Rosario Forlenza, 'Voegelin's Impact on the Italian Response to Modernity: The Parallel Life-Works of Augusto Del Noce and Eric Voegelin', *VoegelinView*, November 26, 2014, at <http://voegelinview.com/voegelins-impact-italian-response-modernity-parallel-life-works-augusto-del-noce-eric-voegelin/> (last consulted: 6 June 2015).

^{lviii} A. Del Noce, 'Eric Voegelin e la crisi dell'idea di modernità,' introduction to E. Voegelin, *op. cit.*, Ref. 57, pp. 7-34 (quote at p. 18); see also A. Del Noce, *op. cit.*, Ref. 1; A. Del Noce, 'Violenza e secolarizzazione della gnosi', in *Violenza. Una ricerca per comprendere*, XXXIV convegno del Centro di studi filosofici di Gallarate, 19-21 aprile 1979 (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1980), pp. 195-216; A. Del Noce, *Secolarizzazione e crisi della modernità* (Naples: ESI, 1981)

^{lix} On Del Noce's explicit endorsement of Voegelin's analysis of the Marxist *fragenverbot*, and how this prohibition paves the way for a 'total revolution,' i.e. totalitarianism writ large, see A. Del Noce, *I caratteri generali del pensiero politico contemporaneo*, I, *Lezioni sul marxismo* (Milan: Giuffrè Editore, 1972), pp. 44-45.

^{lx} On Del Noce's view on totalitarianism see G. Ceci, 'Del Noce critico del totalitarismo', in Ceci and Cedroni, *op. cit.*, Ref. 4, pp. 65-94.

^{lxi} The term 'società opulenta' appeared first in Del Noce's 1963 'Appunti sull'irreligione occidentale' later collected in *Il problema dell'ateismo*. The concept derives from Rodano with whom, from 1960 to 1967, Del Noce re-established the intense intellectual relationship that had been interrupted in 1945. See also M. Borghesi, *op. cit.*, Ref. 32, pp. 269-309.

^{lxii} A. Del Noce, *op. cit.*, Ref. 1, p. 14

^{lxiii} N. Bobbio, 'Del Noce, filosofo dell'antimoderno', *Società e Cultura*: special section of *La Stampa*, 2 January 1990; N. Bobbio, 'Io e Augusto Del Noce', *Il Nuovo Areopago*, 9 (1990), pp. 74-79; N. Bobbio, 'I miei conti con Del Noce', *La Stampa*, 31 December 1991; A. Del Noce and N. Bobbio, 'Dialogo sul male assoluto', *Micromega*, 1 (1990), pp. 231-237.

^{lxiv} Such as Müller, *op. cit.*, Ref. 6, pp. 132-143; see also J-W. Müller, 'Towards a New History of Christian Democracy', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 18 (2013), pp. 243-255; and, for a discussion focused specifically on Italy, J-W. Müller, 'The Paradoxes of Post-War Italian Political Thought', *History of European Ideas*, 39 (2013), pp. 79-102 (esp. pp. 84-89).

^{kv} From 'Appunti per una filosofia dei giovani', first published in *Vita e Pensiero*, V (1968), 399-413, now in Del Noce, *op. cit.*, Ref. 1, pp. 21-39 (quote at p. 26).