

Luigi Taparelli, SJ, and “The Two Economies”¹

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The great historian of the Social Catholic movement in Italy, Gabriele De Rosa, in his introductory note to this 1856 essay by Luigi Taparelli, SJ, from the *Civiltà Cattolica*—a journal referred to by some Church historians as “the Pope’s think tank”—states,

These articles of Fr. Luigi Taparelli d’Azeglio, had much influence in the elaboration of *Rerum Novarum*, together with another of his articles entitled “Critical Analysis of the First Concepts of Social Economy”.² ... Matteo Liberatore, to whom Leo XIII entrusted the redaction of the first draft of *Rerum Novarum*, in an article titled “Of Political Economy” ... anticipates many passages that reappear in the first draft of the Encyclical, [and that] explicitly connect themselves to themes already dealt with, thirty years before, by Fr. Taparelli.³

Taparelli co-founded the *Civiltà Cattolica* with the support of Pope Pius IX in 1850. We can note in addition that Matteo Liberatore, SJ, was one of several Taparelli protégés from before the founding of the journal, as was also Gioacchino Pecci, the subsequent Pope Leo XIII, back to Taparelli’s time as Rector of the restored Collegio Romano in the 1820s. Taparelli’s shadowy influence over the revival of Thomistic philosophical studies and over the take-off of modern Catholic social thought is not mysterious at all but simple politics. From Taparelli’s writings in *Civiltà Cattolica* from its founding until his death in 1862, he had become widely, if quite unjustly, considered the epitome of a Vatican reactionary zealot. Pope Leo XIII in promulgating the revolutionary

Rerum Novarum had made more than one compromise in the text, and outside of the text, so to speak, to assure that modern Catholic social teaching was not stillborn from hostile reaction by Catholic liberals on the watch for any anachronisms that seemed at odds with modern circumstances and developments.⁴ No amount of later papal promotion⁵—Pope Pius XI said Taparelli should be studied right after St. Thomas himself—seemed likely to bring the kind of attention he deserves as the founder of the prominent natural law principles of social justice and of subsidiarity.

One reason for continued neglect has to do with Taparelli's theoretical and methodological approach of combining theoretical reasoning with practical application to social scientific questions, taking inspiration from an Aristotelian-Thomistic approach. In this regard, we can see Taparelli's influence over the method that appears in Pius IX's famous "Syllabus of Errors" which brought attention to the difference between abstract, universal truths, and contingent, concrete historical circumstances, where prudential considerations and competing rights are relevant. Dialectical reasoning combined with empirical historical reasoning—reflecting Taparelli's inspiration also from Montesquieu—infuriated Catholic liberals who often, unaware of their own ideological paradigms, were not willing to consider the relevance of anything metaphysical.

Another quite practical reason is that Taparelli's foundational *Theoretical Treatise on Natural Right Based on Fact* (1840–1843, with various editions to 1945) has not been translated into English. It was translated in the 1850s and afterwards into German, French, and Spanish, for use in Jesuit seminaries. His twelve years of bi-weekly essays for the *Civiltà Cattolica*, also not translated, present a formidable body of work to cover. Largely fellow Jesuits and especially colleague Jesuits of the *Collegio degli Scrittori della Civiltà Cattolica* have kept Taparelli Studies alive,⁶ while in the English-speaking world, interest is growing and requires first and foremost an expanded program of translation. The *Journal of Markets & Morality* has particularly been supportive of this effort.

Then there are the questions of style. Taparelli was given the charge by Pius IX to respond with hand-to-hand combat to liberals and socialists attacking the Church and religion generally. Taparelli has his high-level abstract reasoning and historical application approach in the *Treatise*, and even there we see polemical wit and sarcasm. This unusual philosophical approach is multiplied in his journal articles. Philosophers, I think it is fair to say, have unfairly ignored Taparelli as a thinker, largely, I also think it is fair to say, having gotten turned off by this style. The examples could be multiplied, from Taparelli's mainly sympathetic biographer, to scholarly critique of Taparelli's theory on subjective

rights and private property, at times based on readings of subsequent applications of Taparelli’s arguments by others.⁷

Taparelli uses punctuation in an aggressive, at times stream of consciousness, way to string together arguments and consequences, from reasoning and experience. This style of linking ideas in a series of clauses is not uncommon still today for Italian scholarly writers. That kind of mix that infuriated (and no doubt still infuriates) modern-minded liberals presents a challenge for the translator. I have followed a fixed rule to stay as close to the literal use of language while making generous allowances, at times, for clarity. Sometimes that means breaking up long chains of clauses that were separated with colons and semicolons. Other times it is necessary to reconnect pronouns with their antecedent, and brackets [e.g.] are liberally used for that purpose or for clarifying a causal relationship in the argument. Parentheses, e.g., (tcb) indicate translations within the translation for some passages from French or Latin. Special characters, asterisks, one or two, etc. are used for editorial notes. The sequentially numbered footnotes are from Taparelli in the original. Some short passages that are uniquely focused on some current event have been deleted and marked with an ellipsis. But it must not ever be forgotten that Taparelli is writing in the wake, distant but still churning, of the French Revolution of 1789, the wars of Napoleonic Europe, Revolutions of 1820, of 1830, and especially of 1848, the Italian Risorgimento and its Wars of Independence, the Kingdom of Italy under Piedmont, the rise and fall of the Roman Republic, and the coup d’état of Louis Napoleon in 1851, not to mention the overall economic, social, and political consequences of industrialization.

Some specific translation points for clarity:

- Indeterminate third person, use “we” or “one” or “you”
- “*Economia*” as “economy” or “economics” or “economic science”
 - “heterodox” or specified as “Catholic”
- “*Morale*” as “ethics” or “morality” or “moral philosophy”
- Definite articles in Italian often not typical in English, sometimes kept
- “*Molla*” as “spring” or “impulse;” note this “*molla*” is used following the clock/watch metaphor for the transmission of energy/power, (cf. the checks and balances language of Montesquieu)—elsewhere Taparelli uses the term of “motors” (cf. the three motors of human action, see Behr, *Social Justice*, op. cit., Appendix).
- “*Interesse*” as almost always “self-interest” or “material self-interest”

Notes

1. *La Civiltà Cattolica* 2, 3rd series (1856): 609–20; *La Civiltà Cattolica* 3: 257–72 (from section IV), 465–85 (from section V), 611–24 (from section VI). See for complete context, Thomas C. Behr, *Social Justice & Subsidiarity: Luigi Taparelli and the Origins of Modern Catholic Social Thought* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019). See also, *L'enciclica "Rerum Novarum": Testo autentico e redazioni preparatorie dai documenti originali*, ed. Giovanni Antonazzi (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1957); Francesco Dante, *Storia della 'Civiltà Cattolica' (1850–1891): Il laboratorio del Papa* (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 1990); Paul Droulers, SJ, “Question sociale, état, église dans la *Civiltà Cattolica* à ses débuts,” in *Cattolicesimo sociale nei secoli XIX e XX. Saggi di storia e sociologia* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1982), 95–122. There is available an edited and translated French version of these essays, Taparelli D’Azeglio, *Essais sur les principes philosophiques de l’économie politique*, ed. and trans. Robert Jacquin (Paris: Lethielleux, 1943).
2. The works cited here are *La Civiltà Cattolica* 8, 3rd ser. (1857): 546–89, and 9, 3rd ser.: 17–34; ET: Luigi Taparelli, “Critical Analysis of the First Concepts of Social Economy (1857),” ed. and trans. Thomas Behr, with introduction, *Journal of Markets & Morality* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 613–38; and *La Civiltà Cattolica* 5, 13th ser. (March 5, 1887): 530.
3. Gabriele De Rosa, *Civiltà Cattolica: 1850–1945* (Florence: L. Landi, 1971).
4. Thomas C. Behr, “The Nineteenth-Century Historical and Intellectual Context of Catholic Social Teaching,” in *Catholic Social Teaching: A Volume of Scholarly Essays*, ed. Gerard V. Bradley and E. Christian Brugger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
5. Pius XI, *Divini Illius Magistri* [Of His Divine Master], sec. 33 (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1929). *Quadragesimo anno* embraces Taparelli’s theories of natural law social organization and the principle of subsidiarity. An important summary of Taparelli’s treatise was brought out during the outbreak of the Second World War in Luigi Taparelli, *Sintesi di diritto naturale* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1940), etc.
6. Apart from some studies in *Civiltà Cattolica* itself, see P. Ciprotti and J. Diez Algeria, eds., *Miscellanea Taparelli* (Rome: Libreria Editrice dell’Università Gregoriana, 1964).
7. Robert Jacquin, *Taparelli* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1943).