

## Luigi Taparelli and a Catholic Economics

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### Luigi Taparelli, the Scholastic Revival, and Catholic Economics

Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio, SJ (1793–1862) pioneered the nineteenth-century renewal of scholastic philosophy and natural-law thought.<sup>1</sup> In his major theoretical work, the *Theoretical Treatise of Natural Right Based on Fact*, Taparelli elaborated a system of natural-law reasoning for addressing the whole range of social-scientific and political issues.<sup>2</sup> His methodology incorporates scholastic natural-law analysis of objective human inclinations, reconciling theoretical conclusions with contingent historical facts.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Behr, "Luigi Taparelli and Social Justice: Rediscovering the Origins of a 'Hollowed' Concept," *Social Justice in Context* 1 (2005): 3–16; "Luigi Taparelli's Natural-Law Approach to Social Economics," *Journal des Économistes et des Études Humaines* 13, nos. 2, 3 (June/September 2003): 213–33; "Luigi Taparelli D'Azeglio, SJ (1793–1862) and the Development of Scholastic Natural-Law Thought as a Science of Society and Politics," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 99–115. For the biography and for the bibliography generally, see R. Jacquin, *Taparelli* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1943), and T. Behr, "Luigi Taparelli and the Nineteenth-Century Neo-Scholastic 'Revolution' in Natural Law and Catholic Social Sciences" (PhD diss.: SUNY Buffalo, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> *Saggio Teoretico di Diritto Naturale Appoggiato sul Fatto*, 1840–1843, in numerous editions and translations in French, German, and Spanish. The most recent Italian edition appeared in 1949 from La Civiltà Cattolica in two volumes.

The *Treatise* is divided into eight *Dissertazioni*. Each proceeds from fundamental principles to logical implications to specific practical applications. The first dissertation is a metaphysical and anthropological inquiry into the nature of man, of human agency and of individual moral action. The second considers the concept of society as an outgrowth of human nature and agency. These first two dissertations together comprise the philosophical discipline related to individual moral conduct, or ethics. The third concerns both the theoretical and the actual historical conditions of the formation of society from which the foundation of natural rights is derived. Here is where he contends with modern natural law and natural rights schools of thought based as they are on abstracted and reductionist views of the human person and on the abstract fictions of the “state of nature.” The fourth considers the natural-law basis of positive lawmaking in society in terms of its ends, that is, for the perfecting of human associations. The fifth considers the forms of political authority that “organically” result from the association of these individuals. Thus, the third, fourth, and fifth dissertations constitute his science of politics based explicitly on his anthropology, social theory, and metaphysics. The sixth considers the relationship among such societies, that is, the issues related to social interdependence, subsidiarity, and social justice—what he calls the rights of hypotactics. Taparelli coined the term *social justice* to refer to the justice due between associations on the same, or at greater or lesser levels, of the social hierarchy. The seventh dissertation is an application of his natural-law social science to specific topics and specific kinds of intermediary associations, and the eighth is a detailed analytical summary of the whole work for pedagogical purposes.

Cofounder in 1850 of the Jesuit intellectual journal *Civiltà Cattolica*, Taparelli applied his natural-law approach in twelve years of biweekly essays to the cultural, economic, social, and political questions of the turbulent mid-nineteenth-century world. Taparelli was invited along with Carlo Maria Curci, SJ, by Pius IX to launch an intellectual journal to confront head-on the political and cultural issues of the day. Its engagement with immediate issues, didactic mission, and high intellectual level has marked the writings of the select group of Jesuits who constitute the *College of Writers of the Civiltà Cattolica* from its beginnings down to today. The journal and its writers have been referred to as “the popes’ think tank” with good reason. The journal has had wide distribution around the Catholic world since its debut. Being written in Italian, however, has had its drawbacks as that language has not been a typical resource among non-Italian scholars of politics or economy. One result has been that disputes over positions articulated in the journal (for all of its 161 years), have at times swirled around hearsay. Famous nineteenth-century Catholic liberals, including Lord Acton,

inveterately thought of Taparelli as a retrograde zealot, without having read much, if any, of his writings.

In book reviews and substantive analysis of particular issues, Taparelli wrote a prodigious amount on economic topics. In the last six years of his life, he turned his attention also to a more fundamental overview of economic science as it then stood, offering an analysis of the failures of “naturalistic” economics and indicating the work needing to be done to craft a Catholic alternative. The essay presented in the current volume, “Analisi critica dei primi concetti dell’Economia sociale” (1857), along with his earlier essay “Le due Economie” (1856), and subsequent “Indirizzo di future trattazioni economiche” (1862), form the foundation of Taparelli’s theoretical insights.<sup>3</sup>

The essay translated here is structured into two main parts with various subdivisions. The preface explains that Taparelli decided to return to a study of fundamental principles after the first article in this series made it clear that progress in establishing a Catholic economic science required more than merely showing the defects, theoretical and practical, of the existing schools. In section 1, “First Idea of Economic Science,” Taparelli analyzes the conflicting definitions of the science and identifies the reasons for its conflicts to be rooted in its bifurcated nature. Economics is not only connected to the nature of creation itself but also to the higher purpose of perfecting human association as part of man’s participation in providing for self and others and is, therefore, subject to considerations of justice and piety. Section 2, “The Motive Powers of Man Concerning Economics,” analyzes how the composite nature of the human subject requires consideration of three distinct but inseparable aspects of motivation, duty, and right: material interests, social interests, and truth interests—something the American Founders would have understood in finding fundamental and inalienable the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. His conclusion is that any economic science that focuses solely on material self-interest and neglects the higher interests of justice and of piety will fail in its understanding of economic behavior and in its promotion of policies for the harmonious material development of society.

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<sup>3</sup> “The Two Economies” and “Direction of Future Economic Treatments.” For additional analysis on Taparelli’s economic thought, besides *supra* Behr, see R. Jacquin, *Essai sur les principes philosophiques de l’économie politique* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1943). This work is an anthology of the three aforementioned articles by Taparelli on economic theory from the *Civiltà Cattolica*, translated into French and accompanied by an extensive introduction and bibliography. See also A. Perego, SJ, *Forma statale e politica finanziaria nel pensiero di Luigi Taparelli d’Azeglio* (Milan: A. Giuffrè, 1956).

Taparelli did not seek to overthrow classical economic thought but rather to supplement its naturalism with a more coherent anthropology. He sought to “baptize” economic science as he found it and return it to its place as a subdiscipline of ethics and politics, without diminishing its value as a positive science of the production, consumption, and distribution of wealth. On the one hand, Taparelli readily admits his debt to economic thinkers before him and understands the caution with which he needed to proceed in the absence of established Catholic doctrine on the subject. On the other hand, Taparelli regards his lack of formation in economics as an asset for viewing the field with greater objectivity above the schools. As an outsider, Taparelli brings a dialectical razor to the existing systems of economic science but goes on to demonstrate the human consequences of theoretical incoherence—as always, applying his “natural law based on fact” method.

## Notes on the Translation and the Anglophone World

Taparelli’s *Treatise* and various collections of his articles have been translated into German, Spanish, and French, largely for use in Jesuit schools. The lack of interest in the anglophone Catholic world for Taparelli’s writing can be attributed to a variety of reasons, not least of which was his (unjust) association within Catholic intellectual circles with some sort of Catholic reactionism or obscurantism. The novelty of Taparelli’s methodology and polemical style also has resisted easy translation.

Some specific translation notes for this essay: for Taparelli, social economics and public economics are relatively synonymous expressions; economic science, economy, and economics are also relatively synonymous. Taparelli’s arguments over lengthy, complex sentences are at times challenging to follow grammatically in English. In Italian, pronouns are gendered and therefore a little easier to trace back to their antecedents. The word *interest* usually means “material interest,” although it would have been much to be desired, I think, if Taparelli had applied the term in his discussion of the three motors of human action, that is, to identify the three levels of human interest that he actually analyzes—the material, social, and spiritual interests of human beings—as the basis for a sound social science and policy. Where appropriate, editorial notes have been added to aid the reader, and Taparelli’s citations have been modernized where sources could be traced more precisely.

Taparelli's influence on Leo XIII is evident in the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879) on restoring Thomistic philosophy and in the *Magna Charta* of Catholic social thought, *Rerum Novarum* (1891),<sup>4</sup> the last draft of which was written by Taparelli protégé Matteo Liberatore. The Jesuit Nell-Breuning employed Taparelli's principles of sociality (or solidarism, as rephrased by Heinrich Pesch, SJ) and subsidiarity in the drafting of Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno*. Indeed, Pius XI believed that Taparelli's writings could "never be studied enough" (*Divini illius magistri*, 1939) and ranked him in importance for Catholic thought right after Saint Thomas.

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<sup>4</sup> See Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno* (May 15, 1931), 39.