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Abstract

Augusto Del Noce (1910-1989) is widely regarded in his home country of Italy as one of the most important political philosophers of the second half of the 20th Century. Renowned for his ability to demonstrate the impact of ideological movements on the history of the 20th Century, Del Noce's work covers a range of topics including modernity, technology, contemporary Catholicism, secularism, eroticism, communism, fascism, and progressivism among other topics. Perhaps controversially, Del Noce is best known for his claim that the failure of Marxism in the 20th Century has not led to its complete dissolution, but rather its incorporation (minus its revolutionary aspect) into a new ideological totalitarianism that now appears in the form of secular progressivism.

Although Del Noce holds a distinguished place within Italian philosophical and intellectual circles, his work has largely remained unknown in most parts of Europe and the English-speaking world. Recently however, as Del Noce's writings have begun to be translated into English, a new and expanded engagement with his work has taken place. While new analyses of Del Noce's thought have slowly appeared in a variety of academic disciplines, no work has yet examined Del Noce's significance for the field of education. As a result, in this essay Matthew Carlin rectifies this oversight by examining a wide range of Del Noce's writing, paying particular attention to how his historico-political analysis of the emergence of modern progressivism necessitates the creation of a new education of limits for the 21st Century.

Key Words: Augusto Del Noce; Progressivism and Education; Marxism and Education; Authority in Teaching and Learning; Limits in Education; Totalitarianism

Introduction

Although Augusto Del Noce's work covers a broad range of topics that only occasionally touch on the theme of education, for those of us engaged in educational research today what is particularly relevant about Del Noce's work is the way that he is uniquely positioned to challenge some of the most intractable ideological positions currently in vogue in educational theory today. The reasons for this are twofold. First, as Carlos Lancellotti¹ writes on the back cover of *The Crisis of Modernity*, Del Noce possesses 'the rare ability to reconstruct intellectual genealogies and to expose the deep metaphysical premises of social and political movements.' He does this not as a secular immanentist or moral relativist, but rather as a theist who provides us with unique insight into the implications of the secularization of society-something that is rarely, if ever questioned within the context of academia

1 Augusto Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014).

today. As a result, an engagement with Del Noce's work has the potential to help educational researchers better identify the impact that specific political movements of the 20th Century have had on the development and spread of the kinds of ideologies that have come to dominate our shared field of study.

Secondly, while Del Noce is widely regarded in Italy as one of the most important philosophers and political thinkers of the second half of the 20th Century his work has remained largely unknown to the English-speaking world. As a result, with the recent translation of his work into English, Del Noce's position in intellectual circles is that of a philosophical interloper whose general anonymity and novel analyses of specific political ideologies can help us engage with educational ideas in previously unforeseen ways. Furthermore, it is his ideological (theistic) and cultural (Italian) position as an outsider that can help us critically analyze our own self-assuredness as it relates to the overarching philosophical suppositions that sustain the current theoretical and practical trajectory of our field.

Although the breadth of Del Noce's work makes him potentially relevant across a wide range of educational themes, in this essay I focus on Del Noce's analysis and critique of what he identifies as contemporary 'progressivism,' - an ideology that I believe merits specific attention due to its pervasive presence both within and outside of contemporary education.

In the following, I begin by providing a brief biographical sketch of Del Noce's life and work. Next, I highlight the key characteristics of what Del Noce identifies as progressivism, paying particular attention to his analysis of the historico-political circumstances in Europe that led to its emergence as the dominant ideological force in the second half of the 20th Century. In the subsequent section, I focus on Del Noce's argument that contemporary progressivism marks the emergence of a 'new totalitarianism.' Finally, I discuss the implications of Del Noce's analysis of progressivism for educational researchers, paying particular attention to how his defense of both authority and the meta-historical in schooling provides us with a way to think of a *new education of limits* in the 21st Century.

Background

Augusto Del Noce was born to an aristocratic family in Pistoia, Italy in 1910. Most of his childhood and formative intellectual years however, were spent in Turin, Italy during the build-up to WWII. It was also in Turin that Del Noce graduated from the university in 1932 after completing his dissertation on the work of Nicolas Malebranche. Upon graduating with his PhD, Del Noce took up various posts as a high school teacher where he was able to teach philosophy while also working on a number of publications² focused on French and Italian philosophy. It was the publication of these essays during his time as a high school teacher that established Del Noce's reputation as a serious and important scholar in philosophy.

It was also during this time in Turin-often regarded as the epicenter of anti-fascist and secular thought in Italy during WWII-that Del Noce's own anti-fascist sentiments began to take shape. In 1935, Del Noce developed a friendship with Aldo Capitini, the famous anti-fascist proponent of non-violence.³ It was the violence of both fascism, as well as the resistance to fascism in the form of Marxism-Communism, that served as a focal point of critique for Del Noce throughout his life. Del Noce once even argued that 'it is precisely the sensitivity to the problem of violence ... that

2 These publications included the following: 'La gnoseologia cartesiana nell'interpretazione di Arnauld' in *Cartesio nel 111° centenario del Discorso sul Metodo*, Vita e Pensiero 1937; 'La veracità divina e i rapporti di ragione e fede nella filosofia di Malebranche' in *Malebranche nel terzo centenario della nascita*, Vita e Pensiero 1938; 'Note sulla critica malebranchiana' *ibid.* 1938; 'Bibliografia Malebranchiana' *ibid.* 1938; 'La personalità di Descartes' in preface to *R. Descartes, Meditazioni metafisiche*, Cedam, Padova, 1940; and 'L'attualità di Malebranche' in *L'attualità dei filosofi calssici* 1943.

3 Massimo Borghesi, "Augusto Del Noce. No-Manichean Thinking" *30Days*, no.10-11 (2009).

distinguishes genuine philosophers from academic philosophers."⁴ Ultimately, it is the theme and defense of non-violence and the 'non-complicity with evil' that philosopher Massimo Borghesi calls the foundational moral thread that runs throughout all of Del Noce's work.⁵

With the end of WWII and the corresponding end of fascism in Italy, Del Noce began thinking more directly about the relationship between Christianity and communism, turning his attention to the work of French philosopher Jacques Maritain. By way of an engagement with Maritain, Del Noce hoped to identify the ways that Marxism and communism might be considered an addition to both Christianity and the development of a new society that was opposed to the use of violence associated with the revolutionary politics of communism.

Del Noce's focus on this question cannot be understood outside of his own Catholic background and his unceasing belief that the means through which a peaceful and just society might come to fruition was through the embrace of the transcendental theological and moral prescriptions of Christianity. It was within this context that his analysis of the relationship between Christianity and communism focused on the question of the history and contemporary presence of atheism in Marxist ideology. The result of this inquiry culminated in the publication of 2 important essays on this topic in 1946⁶ as well as the 1964 publication of what is widely regarded as his finest book *Il Problema dell'Ateismo*.⁷ It is in *Il Problema dell'Ateismo* that Del Noce develops one of his most poignant and critical assessments of atheism, namely that atheism is not the result of the inevitable teleological

4 Augusto Del Noce, "Violenza e secolarizzazione della gnosi", *Violenza. Una ricerca per comprendere* (Morcelliana: Brescia, 1980) 205.

5 Borghesi, "Augusto Del Noce. No-Manichean Thinking" 30Days, no.10-11 (2009).

6 Augusto Del Noce, "Intorno alla filosofia di Marx", *Rivista di filosofia XXVII* (1946) 223-233; and "La 'non-filosofia' di Marx e il comunismo come realtà politica" in *Il materialismo storico, Atti I congresso internazionale di Filosofia*, Castellani, Roma (1946).

7 *The Problem of Atheism* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1964)

advance of rationalism, but rather a problematic symptom of modernity's complete negation of all previous forms of thought and tradition.

In the 1970's Del Noce's attention shifted slightly to the corresponding theme of secularization when he published a collection of essays in a book entitled *L'Epoca della Secolarizzazione*⁸; and a controversial book entitled *Il Suicidio della Rivoluzione*⁹. It was in the book *Il Suicidio della Rivoluzione* in which he argued that the destruction of the Marxist revolutionary project and its dissolution into nihilism was already present in the work of Antonio Gramsci-an argument that continues to be as compelling as it is contentious. This last point regarding the dissolution of Marxism supports one of Del Noce's more important and controversial arguments: namely that the failure of Marxism as a political project has not led to its complete elimination, but rather its incorporation into the ideological framework of secular progressivism. For Del Noce, it is within secular progressivism that the culturally destructive impetus of Marxism (minus its revolutionary intention) was appropriated in the service of the bourgeoisie and the 'affluent society' who were subsequently able to advance the idea of moral relativism and the complete elimination of all forms of tradition and values from society. In other words, for Del Noce, 20th Century Marxism served as nothing more than the catalyst for the development and advancement of bourgeois society.

Toward the end of his life, Del Noce increasingly became more of a public intellectual, publishing essays in a range of newspapers and non-academic journals. He died suddenly in 1989 just a few days after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Homo Progressivus

8 *The Age of Secularization* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1970)

9 *The Suicide of the Revolution* (Milano: Rusconi, 1978)

The idea of progress is one that has both motivated and frustrated people for centuries. It has served as a source of motivation in the way that it provides a promise that our lives will continue to be improved through new advancements in science coupled with effective social engineering. At the same time, the promise of progress has also served as a source of unending frustration. In spite of an overwhelming amount of evidence gathered through the centuries that points to one disaster after another committed in the name of progress, much of the world continues to maintain an intractable faith in this idea.

For American readers, it is in the writing of social-historian Christopher Lasch that we find the most sustained historical critique of the idea of progress.¹⁰ For Lasch, the very contradiction in which the concept of progress serves as both a source of hope and frustration, compels us to look at the ways that the founders of liberal society in the 18th Century took it upon themselves to identify the ways through which humanity's ever-expanding needs and wants could be satisfied by way of increasingly refined economic development. In the work of 18th Century political economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo one finds what Lasch refers to as the 'moral rehabilitation' of desire.¹¹ Similar to the way that curiosity serves as the catalyst of scientific endeavours, the ever-increasing needs and desires produced through capitalist expansion would serve as the impetus for economic development and the increasing refinement of everyday life.¹² In other words, for Lasch, human beings' 'insatiable desire' that was once understood to be a force of spiritual disintegration and unhappiness, was now understood to be the fuel through which economic planning could help us achieve a steady and unending

10 *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics*. (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991).

11 *ibid.* 52.

12 For a fuller elaboration of the relation of needs and capitalism, see Agnes Heller *The Theory of Needs in Marx* (London: Allison and Busby Press, 1976).

improvement in our everyday lives.¹³ For Lasch, it is specifically the positive outlook on wants and desires that differentiates progressivism and its liberal forebears from the Christian reliance on providence. Although Christianity raises history from its desultory trajectory, it does not portend a history of endless improvement. Instead, Christianity elevates *the idea of limits* as a spiritual virtue. It is in this sense that the idea of progress and the doctrine of progressivism can rightly be understood to be essentially secular.¹⁴

Augusto Del Noce's argument regarding the idea of progress takes a similar trajectory in that it attempts to identify the relationship that the idea of progress has to the overall secularization of society that has accompanied modernity. However, instead of providing an overview of the idea of progress through history, Del Noce is most interested in providing readers with an understanding of how 'progressivism' as a doctrine assumed an increasingly prevalent place within everyday life in the post-WWII era. He attends to this problem by attempting to identify the 'genesis' of progressivism by way of a historico-political assessment of the dominant political events in Europe during the 20th Century.¹⁵ In Del Noce's estimation, it is only through the application of this particular historico-political methodological approach that we can come to a better understanding of the full extent to which progressivism has come to entrench itself as the predominant ideological guide of social, cultural, and theological life in much of the world today. The two core historico-political events that Del Noce focuses on during the mid-20th Century are the rise and defeat of fascism in Europe, and the defeat and subsequent incorporation of Marxist ideology into the increasingly championed Enlightenment ideals of the post-WWII era.

13 Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics*, 13.

14 *ibid.* 46.

15 Augusto Del Noce *The Age of Secularization* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017) 36-37.

For Del Noce, in the mid-20th Century the rise of fascism in Europe led not only to a humanitarian crisis that spread across the continent during this time, but also to a crisis of comprehension. As a result, Del Noce not only focuses his analysis of this period on the legitimacy and veracity of the primary explanations for the rise of fascism that appeared in post-WWII Europe, but also on coming to a better understanding of the impact that these explanations had on the subsequent cultural, political, and theological development of Europe.

For Del Noce, the seeming urgency to immediately provide a comprehensive explanation for the rise of fascism after its ultimate defeat resulted in the misguided categorization of all authoritarian political movements (including that of fascism) as essentially reactionary in nature. This conception of fascism as reactionary necessitated an increased embrace of Enlightenment ideals as the foil to any positive rendering of the past and tradition. Instead of considering the possibility that the cultural, political and theological traditions that existed prior to the war contained within them some beneficial and even anti-fascistic ideals that were essential for the survival of future generations, the entirety of past was relegated to the dustbin of history. In other words, it was the fear that those traditions contained within them the seeds of the despotism that their elimination, and everything else that had come before, was justified. Speaking of the immediate post-WWII era, Del Noce argued that, '...what had to be rediscovered as the truly modern attitude - able to gauge the destiny of mankind - was the Enlightenment as a disposition to declare a break with traditional structures and criticize them inexorably from an ethical, political and social standpoint'.¹⁶ In short, the condemnation of anything related to the past, and those institutions that carried on the traditions of the past, were perceived as the pre-requisite to ensuring that fascism would never achieve prominence again.

16 *ibid.* 40.

'Progress' out of the ashes of WWII became inextricably tied to the promise of social, technological, and scientific advancements and knowledge. As a result, during the decades that followed the end of the war, there was a change in the way that the terms 'progressivism' and 'traditionalism' were understood. While originally being utilized as adjectives to describe one's philosophical and moral foundation as it related to modernity as a whole, these terms were now posited as 'substantives'.¹⁷ As a result, instead of characterizing a general relation to modernity, these terms began to depict certain essential features of one's socio-political disposition. 'Traditionalism' became associated with being closed and dogmatic, while 'progressivism' came to describe those who demonstrated an openness and capability to engage in dialogue.¹⁸ It was this change in the way that these terms were utilized that depicted the stark division between progressivism and traditionalism that began to emerge in the second half of the 20th Century.

Del Noce identifies the new age in which these former adjectives became substantives as an age of negation. However, instead of ushering forth a relation to the world that promised some new ideal, this new ideological position in regard to the past was aimed at negating what existed solely for the sake of negation itself. In reference to this turning point in European history he argued during the 1980's that, '(P)erhaps the most novel feature of today's situation is precisely this: in the past, the appearance of a new ideal would push existing ideals into a crisis, discriminating among them, saving some, rejecting others. Today, the point of departure is total negation, and the new ideal remains undetermined precisely because the negation is total'.¹⁹ In other words, the condemnation of the past by way of a thorough commitment to negation not only discards what were deemed to be the seeds of fascism, but simultaneously prohibit the formation of any new values or ideals. As a result, for Del

17 *ibid.* 36.

18 *ibid.*

19 *ibid.*

Noce, progressivism should be properly understood as a 'negative millennialism' - where a hope for future liberation is tied to the erasure, or negation of what had come before.²⁰

This 'rebirth' of the Enlightenment was a direct result of the conception of the fascistic elements of Europe as symptomatic of a society that was fearful of transcendence but now ready to sweep away the remnants of superstition and myth in favor of adulthood. Subsequently, as Del Noce points out, this moment in European history depicted all of the clichés one could muster regarding Kant's conception of the Enlightenment as the process by which humanity sweeps away its own self-incurred tutelage by recognizing its ability to make decisions on its own.²¹

The second part of Del Noce's historico-political analysis of 'progressivism' focuses on the way that the renewed post-war commitment to the Enlightenment was not necessarily reflective of some of its original ideals that offered a much more tempered outlook on the acceptance of the new. Instead, the new ideological formation that highlighted the post-war transition became a more radicalized version of its original 18th Century formation as a direct result of coming into contact with Marxist ideology. In spite of its defeat as a political movement around the world, Del Noce argued that Marxism could not be surpassed and instead could only be incorporated into the socio-political context in which it appeared. What did he mean by this?

Del Noce makes the argument that in the 20th Century, Marxism took root specifically in those places where the apocalyptic vision of revolution and the corresponding emergence of a new world was perceived as a form of salvation and deliverance. Berdyaev²² argues that this was exactly the case in early 20th Century Russia where Marxism was able to find a home because it offered up 'a doctrine of

20 *ibid.* 44.

21 *ibid.* 41.

22 Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Origin of Russian Communism*, trans. R.M. French (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960) 132.

deliverance tied to the messianic vocation of the proletariat' and the creation of a 'perfect society'. The possibility of this new world was aligned with the ethical and theological traditions that existed in the country prior to Marxism's arrival as an ideological force—specifically Orthodox Christianity.²³ As this messianic version of Marxism failed to deliver within the context of the Bolshevik revolution, dialectical materialism as revolutionary principle was abandoned and what was left was historical materialism in the form of total relativity. Subsequently, all values and ideals espoused at any given time were solely the values expressed by a specific generation, including that of the revolutionary principles inherent to dialectical materialism.

For Del Noce, it was historical materialism dissociated from the principles of revolution that gradually made its way into the Western world inciting a consolidation between the liberal ideals of the resistance in Europe and Marxism.²⁴ He argues, '(R)econciliation' between liberal ideals and Marxism 'was possible on the condition that liberalism be cut off from any tie with transcendent or immanent religion'...while '(M)arxism, in turn, had to be cut off from ... theologism'.²⁵ In other words, the idea of revolutionary deliverance became untethered from tradition by way of its merger with the scientism of the Enlightenment that was regarded as the only defense against the 'reactionary' fascist nightmare that plagued Europe during the middle of the Century. By disposing of the religious dimension of revolution, the Marxist promise of social upheaval was able to merge with the secular and scientific outlook of the Enlightenment that was now called upon to play a revolutionary role in dissolving all of

23 Although not appearing until the 1950's, one could also make a similar assessment regarding the spread and continued relevance of Marxism within the context of Latin America and the rise of progressive Christianity in the form of liberation theology.

24 Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, 106.

25 *ibid.* 106-107.

the values that the first half of the Century had affirmed and defended.²⁶ Put differently, this convergence with Marxism radicalized the Enlightenment in order to enable it to forever avoid those aspects of everyday life in European society that once allowed its original liberal ideals to be overthrown by romanticism.²⁷ In this new, post-revolutionary context, as the social became immanentized through the intensified embrace of scientism, the notion of transcendence became completely horizontalized. Once science achieved its new status as the sole producer of legitimate knowledge, worldly amelioration became confined to the material world and unending forms of individual and social engineering.

Interestingly for Del Noce, this historico-political transformation of Europe marked by the convergence of a radically secularized Enlightenment with a Marxism purged of its biblical archetypes, shouldn't be recognized as a triumph of revolutionary politics in finding a home in multiple, new spheres of the modern world. Rather, this new economic and socio-cultural formation should properly be understood as the triumph of the bourgeois spirit over the revolution. He states,

'...the Marxist revolution has been the precondition that allowed the moral features [of the bourgeois spirit] to come to the surface, while removing the circumstances that could bring about the revolutionary apocalypse. ...Marxism, instead of defeating the bourgeois spirit, enabled it to take a step further: viewed in the context of world history, it seems to have been the precondition that allowed the fundamental

26 Del Noce, *The Age of Secularization*, 108.

27 Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, 174-175.

break with ... traditional civilizations".²⁸

Del Noce makes clear that progressivism is nothing more than the triumph of the bourgeoisie that was able to become untethered from past traditions in pursuit of a more unabashed libertinism.

Del Noce wasn't the only one with a similar critique of the kind of libertinism that appeared in the wake of WWII and culminated in the late 1960's. Philosopher Michel Clouscard criticized May 1968 in similar terms in his book *L'Être et le Code*.²⁹ Specifically, Clouscard identified the way that the permissiveness inherent to the politics of May 68 would simply create new markets that would eventually lead to a libertine leftism that could then be neatly appropriated by the market and utilised as a catalyst for the emergence of new forms of consumption and a less restricted economy. Unlimited abundance and growth in economic terms was boosted by the emergence of new forms of sexual expression and hedonistic activities that were oriented toward undermining and deracinating everything including people, states, nations, families, religions, and markets, all in the name of progress. Clouscard was one of the few who realised that middle class student graffiti in Paris during this time such as 'Il est interdit d'interdire' (it is forbidden to forbid) and 'Vivre sans temps mort, jouir sans entraves' (Live without dead time, enjoy without hindrances') were ideological foundations of the progressive, bourgeois, capitalist future to come. What was left of the Marxist revolutionary spirit of the post-WWII era was not to be found in the realm of economic analysis but rather in the libertinism of bourgeois culture and middle class youth of the 1960's.

When conceived together, the argument made by both Del Noce and Clouscard is that the unleashing of sexual desire and experimentation in the 60's (i.e. libertinism) was the socio-cultural fuel that made possible the neo-liberal transformation of capitalism on a global level in the 1970's. What is

²⁸ *ibid.* 210.

²⁹ *Being and the Code* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1972).

important to point out is that what Del Noce and Clouscard are referring to is not the same as libertarianism—a term that is much more commonly found in educational theory in connection with descriptions and critiques of the impact of the market on various aspects of pedagogical practice. While these terms share an etymological root with the Latin *libertas*, that highlights the fact that both libertinism and libertarianism are arguments related to the defense of personal/individual autonomy and freedom, there are few similarities between these concepts.

Libertarianism puts forth the argument that one should be free from prohibitive and restrictive violence enacted by outside institutions or individuals. While this concept is typically associated with the freedom to participate in economic transactions between consenting individuals, it is better understood as a political approach to personal freedom based on the mutual agreement not to cause conflict (or what is commonly referred to in libertarian circles as the non-aggression principle). Any action or belief is acceptable for libertarians as long as it doesn't impede upon or limit another's personal liberty. While one may fight back or retaliate, libertarianism precludes the possibility of inciting violence on another.³⁰

Libertinism is similarly oriented toward the defense of personal/individual autonomy and freedom, it is a concept that defends one's freedom to engage in unlimited forms of sexual expression or hedonism without being limited by historically derived norms and morality. In other words, libertinism is the application of moral and ethical relativism on all forms of sexual and hedonistic expression.

30 For more on the definitions of libertarianism as well as the difference between libertarianism and libertinism see Hans Hermann Hoppe 1989 *A Theory of Social and Capitalism* (Boston: Kluwer); Murray Rothbard 1970 *Power and the Market: Government and the Economy* (Kansas City: Sheed Andrews and McMeel); 1973 *for a New Liberty* (New York: Macmillan); Walter Block 'Libertarianism and Libertinism' *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 11, No. 1 (1994, 117-128);

Although libertinism was once understood as a prelude to the Enlightenment, during the 2nd half of the 20th Century it came to assume the key aspect of a conception of the Enlightenment that replaced the original ideal of 'freedom for' with 'freedom from'.³¹ It was at this juncture that the conception of progress came to reflect the dominant libertine cultural and social ethos of the time, abandoning any pretense of ethical consideration regarding the impact of new ideas and innovations, and instead becoming the expression of the abandonment of all limits in the pursuit of personal pleasure and happiness. While it might be easy to understand libertinism in the context of cultural and social life, Clouscard and Del Noce's analysis is prescient in the way that it understands how the relativistic force of libertinism would serve as the fuel for the expansion of consumptive practices, and the simultaneous destruction of those forms of tradition that had previously served as a limit to capitalist accumulation. It is for this reason, that both Clouscard and Del Noce recognize that although some forms of contemporary capitalism may seem to defend libertarian economic principles in certain circumstances as they relate to the non-aggression principle, it is really libertinism and its embrace of historical and moral relativism that serves as the ur-force of contemporary economic life.

By focusing on the way that libertinism and hedonism are both socially and economically problematic, we can begin to see the ways that the concept of limits appears in Del Noce's work as a kind of ethical exhortation. In this case, it is also worth noting, that there is no reference by Del Noce to this imperative as it relates to education. However, what we do begin to see is the outlines of a possible approach to the importance of engaging with limits as an ethical imperative, not only in terms of thinking about how we might counter the deleterious effects of progressive ideology in our approach to teaching and learning, but also how an engagement with the question of limits is essential to the development of a pedagogy that is inherently antagonistic to capital.

31 Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, 108.

Progressivism as the New Totalitarianism

It is one thing to identify progressivism as the dominant ideology of the post-WWII era, but it is another to grasp the impact that this new unabashed embrace of libertinism would have on Europe during this period. For Del Noce, the exchange of liberal values such as 'freedom for' with 'freedom from' represented an imminent danger to the survival of Europe. As a result, in the early 1970's Del Noce published two essays in the journal *L'Europa*³² that put forward the argument that the misidentification of fascism as a 'romantic' attachment to the past, and the subsequent embrace of limitlessness, did not lead to human liberation, but rather to the emergence of a new totalitarianism. Del Noce argued that in spite of the widespread belief that the best defense against totalitarianism was found in a renewed commitment to a complete emancipation from all that had come before, what was really occurring with the introduction of this ideology was the development of a new form of human subjugation.

For Del Noce, this new totalitarian subjugation should not be understood as a form of political domination as had been the case with previous totalitarianisms such as fascism and communism. Rather, this new totalitarianism should be understood as force of disintegration aimed at the complete elimination of the past, and consequently the complete destruction of all 'fatherlands'.³³ In the eyes of Del Noce, the new dominant ideology that aimed at the elimination of all former tradition represented nothing less than the end of Europe, its relegation to a mere idea (that of the 'West'), and ultimately its fulfilment as the land of sunset. In other words, by committing to the destruction of all tradition, both

32 "Verso un nuovo totalitarismo," *L'Europa* 4 no. 7/8, 10-15 (1971): 10-15 ; "Le Ombre del domani," *L'Europa* 4 no. 15 (1971): 11-35.

33 Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, 91.

good and bad, the existence of Europe as anything other than a geographical location, was put into jeopardy.

For Del Noce, in spite of that fact that the former totalitarianisms that emerged in the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy during the mid-20th Century represented a form of political domination that existed in stark contrast to the new kind of totalitarianism that appeared in their wake, they did share one fundamental characteristic: the 'negation of the universality of reason'.³⁴ In the case of communism, we find that opposition to its political program did not express rational concerns but rather hidden interests attributable to one's class position. In the case of Nazism, their political opponents did not express rational concerns but rather specific racial interests. In the case of progressivism, the opposition to limitlessness and permissiveness did not express rational concerns, but were representative of a hidden 'reactionary spirit' that imprisoned its proponents in the myths of the past. For Del Noce, this abandonment of the universality of reason means that eventually, all dissenters need to be persecuted.³⁵

Del Noce makes this disconcerting claim by highlighting three specific aspects of progressivism that became ubiquitous in the post-WWII era that both negate the universality of reason and eliminate the possibility of the emergence of any dissent to its ideological framework. These aspects of progressivism are summed up by Del Noce³⁶ as the move from 'verticalism to horizontalism', the emergence of 'scientism', and the abandonment of 'traditional ethics.'

The primary issue that pervades all three of the above-mentioned aspects of progressivism has to do with the elevation of science as the only legitimate form of knowledge. In other words, beginning

34 *ibid.* 230.

35 *ibid.*

36 Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*.

in the 1600's the concept of *cognitio fidei*, or the conception of faith as a form of knowledge itself³⁷ was slowly replaced by reason and science as the only legitimate form of knowing. Although the elevation of scientific reason was indicative of modernity and the Enlightenment as a whole, the post-WWII era brought with it a more radicalized commitment to the denial of the past and the corresponding elevation of science as the only form of genuine knowledge. Vertical causality was replaced with horizontal causality as the connection between physics and metaphysics was eliminated in favor of the search for a connection between phenomena in the material world.³⁸ Put differently, for Del Noce, the 'verticalism' that marked the past in the way that it maintained a relation to religion and the transcendental (specifically Christianity) was slowly replaced by the 'horizontalism' of the Copernican revolution.³⁹ In spite of this revolutionary transformation regarding our knowledge of the world, there remained for many centuries an acceptance that religion/faith and science occupied separate but equally legitimate spheres of knowledge. However, in the second half of the 20th Century, any pretense to the legitimacy of religion was completely abandoned in the face of the elevation of scientific knowledge to its singular unassailable status. Del Noce points out that every form of metaphysical knowing including that of religion is now depicted as only expressing, 'subjective reactions,' that will eventually be explained 'by extending science to the human sphere through psychological and sociological research'.⁴⁰ This new expanse of scientific inquiry into specifically human spheres explains the ease in which political opposition to the progressive ideal could be

37 See Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica (Vol. 1)*. (London, UK: Catholic Way Publishing, 2014) and Edith Stein, *Faith and Knowledge* (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2000).

38 Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, 88.

39 *ibid.* 89.

40 *ibid.*

depicted in entirely negative terms. Particularly in the field of psychology, those who live according to cultural and religious tradition were, and continue to be portrayed as suffering from some kind of pathology.

To illustrate this last point, Del Noce focuses specifically on the work of Wilhelm Reich that serves as a prime example of how scientism, expanded into the human sphere, was able to politicize reason in the service of eliminating the legitimacy of opposition to the libertinism inherent to progressive ideology. It is specifically in Reich⁴¹ that one finds the argument that the nuclear family and traditional morality not only serve as forms of oppression in the way that they prohibit sexual gratification and thus impede the supposed liberatory potential of permissiveness, but consequently also serve as the basis of fascist totalitarianism.⁴²

The final characteristic of Del Noce's conception of the new totalitarianism is the negation and replacement of any remnants of traditional ethics or a normative value system with a radical moral relativism. In the post-WWII context, what we find is that the commitment to eliminating any remnant of tradition and religion from the contemporary conceptualization of the world necessarily entails the erasure of any trans-historical significance of the way that people conceive of the good. The new morality situated upon the singular progressive value of limitlessness is inherently opposed to the formulation of a normative order of values. As a result, the scope of ethics in its modern, post-War formulation is oriented toward individual well-being and the corresponding removal of all perceived

41 Wilhelm Reich, *The sexual revolution, toward a self-governing character structure*. (T. P. Wolfe, Trans.). (New York, NY: Orgone Institute Press, 1945); Wilhelm Reich, *The mass psychology of fascism*. (T. P. Wolfe, Trans.). (New York, NY: Orgone Institute Press 1946).

42 Del Noce speaks about Reich at length in various essays and book chapters. This particular essay is not the place to discuss his analysis in detail. However, suffice it to say, Reich's work serves as a focal point of Del Noce's critique of the libertine/progressive ethos.

forms of repression defined by the new scientism. By conceiving of limits and a normative conception of the good as essentially a form of subjugation, all claims of objective, universal truth and moral certitude are dismissed. Under the weight of progressivism, the normative order of values has disintegrated, and this disintegration leaves us with a conception of ethics judged to the degree that it serves as 'vitalizing tools' in the pursuit of well-being.⁴³

For Del Noce, the promotion of ethics as a vitalizing tool is the product of a misunderstanding of ethics itself. Instead of understanding ethics as a code of conduct that assists people in distinguishing between morally good and morally bad behaviour, progressive ideology eliminates the trans-historical conception of ethics so that the good becomes conflated with eudemonology, or the science of happiness.⁴⁴ In ethical terms, an education that is faithful to limits, would be an education that acknowledges and prioritizes universal truth and a normative order of values as indispensable in the process of helping students identify how to apply what they learn in a way that is cognizant of the difference between a common, existential good and individual happiness.

The result for Del Noce is that ethics is subsumed by politics and the good is coupled with the pursuit of power. In this case, progressive ideology now infused with the culturally destructive dynamism of historical materialism, is able to dismiss any connection and responsibility to the past in advancing its own revolutionary ideals in the form of limitlessness. The new conception of ethics is totalitarian to the extent that it has replaced all metaphysical absolutes and normative conceptions of values with *the* moral principle inherent to progressive ideology: that the good is nothing more than the relativistic pursuit of well-being and the capture of power. As Del Noce argues, once happiness and the

43 Del Noce, *The Age of Secularization*. 167.

44 See Matthew Carlin, 'Gnosticism, Progressivism and the Impossibility of the Ethical Academy,' *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, October, 2019.

good are separated from fidelity to the trans-historical, it becomes individualized and tied to 'sensations, emotions, and the desire of the individual.'⁴⁵

Authority and Education

In Del Noce's work there is little in the way of a direct discussion about education and schooling. The topic is not completely absent from his writing, but nowhere does the topic of formal education serve as the primary focal point of his work. In an essay published posthumously in 1993⁴⁶ however, Del Noce writes about schooling as part of a broader analysis and critique of what he viewed as the contemporary misunderstanding of the difference between authority and power. In this particular essay, Del Noce points out that although the conflation of these two concepts was first evident in the work of Max Weber⁴⁷ and Theodor Eschenburg⁴⁸ who erroneously understood authority as that which engenders compliance and dependency in human beings, this 'theoretical error' became increasingly prevalent in the later part of the 20th Century as the reign of 'freedom' accelerated in the aftermath of WWII.

For Del Noce, one of the conceptual mistakes inherent to the post-WWII era, and progressive ideology in particular, is the way that the idea of 'authority' is mistakenly associated with that of

45 Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*. 236. Del Noce's own thinking regarding the relationship between *being* and happiness is related to the work of both Antonio Rosmini, *Principle of Ethics* (T. Watson and D. Cleary Trans.) (Durham, UK: Rosmini House, 1989) and Jacques Ellul, *Metamorphose du bourgeois* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1967).

Following both Rosmini and Ellul, Del Noce argues that once happiness and well-being are separated from the fidelity to *being* and the beatitudes, they become 'individualized ... tied to sensations, emotions, and the desires of individuals.'

46 Augusto Del Noce, 'Autorita', in *Rivoluzione Risorgimento Tradizione* (Giuffrè: Milan, 1993): 513-578.

47 Max Weber, 'Three Types of Legitimate Rule,' *Berkeley Publications in Society and Institutions* 4, no. 1 (1958): 1-11.

48 Theodor Eschenburg, *Über Autorität* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1965).

'repression' and that which impedes humanity from reaching its full potential.⁴⁹ As a form of 'repression', the existence and practice of authority became synonymous with power, and subsequently as something to be undermined. In much the same way that the increasing embrace of libertinism⁵⁰ during this period perceived all forms of tradition, including those connected to morality, as barriers to be overcome in the pursuit of novel forms of self-expression, the idea of authority was granted a similar fate.⁵¹

For Del Noce, the elimination of any positive conception of authority is one of the fundamental traits of the contemporary world and representative of the destruction of 'the idea of the father' that sustained such institutions as that of the family, the school, and the Church for many centuries.⁵² In

49 Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*. 190.

50 It is worth noting that Del Noce identifies the appearance of libertinism in the wake of revolutionary movements throughout history. He argues, 'We can say that libertinism, as mere opposition of freedom and authority, is constantly found in history whenever a philosophical process reaches an atheistic conclusion, and also that it always follows the defeat of a revolution: Bruno's revolution at the end of the Renaissance, the Jacobin at the end of the Enlightenment, and the Marxist today. Thus what changes is not the arguments, which are all of a radically negative type, but rather the extension of the phenomenon, which in the 1600's affected the aristocracy and at the end of the eighteenth century the bourgeoisie, whereas in our time it has become a mass phenomenon.' *ibid.* 210.

51 The famous study entitled *Studies on Authority and the Family*, a partial translation of the investigations by the International Institute of Social Research published in *Autorität und Familie, Schriften des Instituts für Sozialforschung*, vol. V., (Paris, 1936) includes essays from Max Horkheimer, Eric Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse, and is probably the most famous and influential book that links authoritarianism with the father and the traditional nuclear family. Eric Fromm also published a book on this topic *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Farrar and Reinhart, 1941), as did Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972). Jessica Benjamin later published an influential essay on this topic, 'Authority and the Family Revisited-Or a World Without Fathers?' *New German Critique* No 13 Special Feminist Issue, 1978) 35-57.

52 Del Noce, *Crisis of Modernity*, 189.

fact, for Del Noce, the new conceptualization of authority in the post-war era 'represents the greatest among the reversals that have come to pass in history', in that it marks 'the stage that has been reached so far by the 'total revolution' which is close to being fully realized in its pars destruens'.⁵³ In other words, the destruction of authority meant the destruction of the idea of the father, and subsequently those institutions that rendered fatherhood as essential for the continuation of Europe.

For Del Noce, in order to fully comprehend the significance of dissolving the idea of the father, and with it the idea of a fatherland (understood, in this case, as the countries of Europe), we must look to the etymology of the concept of authority in order to make sense of this claim. The word 'authority' comes from the Latin word 'auctoritas' that is derived from the word 'augere' which means to make grow.⁵⁴ According to Del Noce⁵⁵, there is a shared etymological origin that connects the word authority with "Augustus' (he who makes grow), 'auxilium' (help provided by a higher power), and 'augurium' (a vow made to obtain divine cooperation and growth).' The significance of this exists in the fact that the etymological root of authority provides us with a view into how the concept originally reflected the idea that one's personal growth was the product of the 'power of attention' directed toward a trans-historical and normative order of values. Furthermore, such values are derived from a fundamental 'principle of non-empirical nature'-which is to say that authority is affirmed externally to evidence.⁵⁶ For Del Noce, it is only when one's 'power of attention' is directed toward a trans-historical moral order that the possibility arises for humanity to become liberated from the 'pressures

53 *ibid.*

54 *ibid.*

55 *ibid.*

56 *ibid.*

from below'.⁵⁷ In other words, the concept of authority was originally understood as a fundamental aspect of the process by which one is freed from subjugation by other human beings by way of subordination to the moral and rational order of meta-historical truth.

Within the context of progressive ideology however, the original meaning of authority becomes reversed. Specifically, the authority inherent to family life, schools, and the Church that was initially presumed to be a guide and source of stability that allowed individuals to be released from the pressures and pitfalls of the everyday, ceased to be regarded as fundamental institutions that foster growth, but rather that which inherently inhibit it. By conceiving of authority as inherently repressive, and tradition as that which impedes human development and progress, this 'reversal' marks the revolutionary embrace of the libertine ethos of 'freedom from'-where liberation becomes based on detaching oneself from any and all remnants of the past through the unending validation of the new. It is in this sense, that Del Noce is able to argue that 'the crisis of the idea of authority is linked with the crisis of tradition.'⁵⁸

In philosophical terms, what we are talking about is the emergence of the primacy of becoming over that of being. For Del Noce, authority and tradition are indivisible from the prioritization of being to such an extent that we could say that'...in the philosophy of the primacy of being, authority is the foundation of power, whereas in the philosophy of the primacy of becoming power absorbs authority within itself... .⁵⁹

Aligned with being, authority is that which engenders freedom by way of subordinating one's own instinctual desires as well as those of other to the trans-historical.⁶⁰ The concept of power, on the

57 *ibid.* 190.

58 *ibid.* 191.

59 *ibid.* 197.

60 *ibid.* 196.

other hand, is that which purports to engender freedom by way of the subordination of oneself to endless forms of self-creation. Without the eternal, and 'freed' from all theological and normative prescriptions, power 'absorbs' forms of authority rendering their discernment impossible.

It is in the post-War context and the embrace of the libertine ethos of 'freedom-from', that the practice and defense of traditional authority becomes linked to various pathologies so that those who defend the idea of a normative order of values and trans-historical truth are quickly identified as having an 'authoritative personality.'⁶¹ Moreover, those who perceive the trans-historical as liberating rather than subjugating, are not only seen as impeding freedom, but also paving the way for the re-emergence of fascism through their refusal to promulgate the unleashing of instinctual desire.

Although within his discussion of the crisis of authority Del Noce identifies three primary institutions that originally served as fundamental sources of growth and freedom, the institution that he places the most importance on is the family. The family is the most fundamental in the sense that it represents the origin of understanding the generative quality of authority as '*auttori*' in the way that it serves as both the source of creation and the source of 'handing down' those values upon which one reproduces life and civilization.⁶²

Schools serve a similar function. For Del Noce, the role of schools and teachers, like that of the family, is to provide guidance that allows students to pursue freedom by way of helping to anchor them to something eternal. However, these institutions are unable to serve as a source of 'handing down' what is eternal once the positive valuation of authority is abolished and the prospects for continuing tradition are viewed as a hindrance in both theory and practice.

61 Here again one might refer to *Autorität und familie, Schriften des Instituts für sozialforschung*, vol. V., (Paris, 1936) as a prime example of this sort of pathologization of authority once it is absorbed by a conception of power.

62 *ibid.*

What is important to note however, is that Del Noce was not arguing that what must be handed down through schools is all that comes from the past. Rather, what is worthy of being handed down is that which is eternal because that which is eternal exists without content. More specifically, the work of the school is to provide students with a recognition of tradition as 'meta-historical' truth that is 'ulterior to every possible way of expressing it ...' and thus inalterable.⁶³ Tradition in this sense could not reflect a national spirit, for example, that would coincide with a fidelity to the founding values of a nation. Instead, such faithfulness to tradition could only refer to that which transcends such content, existing independently of it.

Within the context of progressivism, the elimination of the authority of the teacher, as well as the relegation of 'tradition' to the past 'explains the widespread criticism of tradition in teaching as 'rote learning' (as the transmission of 'dead' notions).⁶⁴ While, for Del Noce, the ideal role of the teacher would be to help students become free from duress and intimidation through providing them with a source of focus and attention, the progressive teacher must renounce their own authority in favor of student 'self-governing.' In spite of some of the benefits of increasing forms of student self-governance, Del Noce warns that self-governance in education can and does lead to the isolation of students, putting them in danger of being sanctioned for any practical or theoretical opposition.⁶⁵

When thought about in the context of the history of education, it is important to look at the way that Del Noce's defense of the role of the teacher, as well as the 'meta-historical' as the foundation for the development of curriculum, genuinely exists in opposition to the ideas inherent to the 'progressive' education movement that emerged in the late 19th Century in the US, Europe and Asia, and continues to this day. In other words, the question becomes in what ways is Del Noce's critique of 'progressive

63 Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, 196.

64 *ibid.*

65 *ibid.*

ideology' applicable to those educational theorists that are generally known in education studies as 'progressive educators.'

There are a number of figures who are generally regarded as the founders of the 'progressive' education movement including Johann Pestalozzi, Colonel Francis Parker, John Dewey, Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner, Celestin Freinet, Loris Malaguzzi, and A.S. Neill, among many others. These first innovators of 'progressive' education were focused predominantly on challenging the traditional, formal model of education that placed heavy emphasis on rote and repetitive forms of teaching and learning. What these 'progressive' innovators shared in terms of their educational philosophies was the fundamental belief that the traditional reliance on memorization and repetition was antithetical to genuine learning. In the place of this kind of 'rote learning' that was predominant in formal schooling in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, they sought to develop new approaches to teaching and learning that were more 'child-centered', experientially based, and sometimes developmentally oriented.

On the one hand, it can be argued that in spite of some of the fundamental and important changes in formal schooling inspired by the work of these innovators, many of the new 'progressive' approaches to education 'ultimately leave in place the machinic, and technological imperative tied to common notions of progress' and demonstrate a complete ineffectiveness in transforming the, 'basic teleology of schooling and its function as a preparatory mechanism for a progressive future of technological wealth metaphysics.'⁶⁶ In other words, the new approaches to education that fall under the heading of 'progressive' sometimes don't adequately address the problem of schooling as an institution designed to prepare students for limitless personal, cultural and societal becoming. On the other hand, it would be disingenuous to say that each of these aforementioned authors who sometimes

66 Matthew Carlin and Nathan Clendenin, "Celestin Freinet: Lesson of a Bourgeois Educator" in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 51:6 (2019) 628-639.

provide strikingly different opinions on the value of the meta-historical in curriculum as well as the place of authority in teaching and learning, can uniformly be critiqued for being adherents to 'progressivism' as Del Noce identifies it. As a result, the place of progressive ideology as it relates to the original 'progressive' educators, has to be assessed on a case by case basis.

One obvious example however, of where Del Noce's critique finds fertile ground is within the context of educational philosophy of A.S. Neill and his conception of 'freedom' as it relates to the disappearance of the teacher as a source of authority.⁶⁷ For Neill, a formal educational environment works best when the traditional authority of the teacher is eliminated and then replaced by self-regulating and autonomous learners who are able to choose their own curriculum.⁶⁸ While it is true that it would be a mischaracterization to claim that Neill understood 'freedom' as synonymous with 'license'⁶⁹, the Summerhill understanding of the role of the teacher still serves as a helpful contrast to the way that Del Noce perceived the authority of the teacher, as well as that of tradition, as indispensable sources for the creation of autonomous learners.

For Del Noce student freedom in regard to learning is possible only as a result of the authority of the meta-historical that is presented by the teacher and not a natural and inevitable aspect of childhood 'emancipated' from such authority. Furthermore, Del Noce argues that student self-governing within the context of schools places students in a precarious position where the prospects for critical dissent are hindered by the group once authority is shifted from the teacher and the meta-historical, to

67 *Summerhill: a radical approach to child rearing* (New York: Hart Publishing, 1960).

68 It is worth mentioning here that one of Neill's greatest intellectual influence was Wilhelm Reich, the focal point of much of Del Noce critique of libertinism and its relationship to progressive ideology. Neill and Reich became friends in the late 1930's and Neill eventually went through therapy with Reich. For more on this see Beverley R. Placzek (ed.) *Record of a friendship: The correspondence between Wilhelm Reich and A. S. Neill, 1936–1957* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1981).

69 see Richard Bailey *A.S. Neill* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

the actions of students and the historicization of truth.⁷⁰ As schools and teachers cease to serve as *authoritative* sources for the continuation of tradition, they are identified as potential sites of *authoritarianism* unless their role corresponds to the mandate of progressive ideology that relegates their function to the act of facilitation. The end result for Del Noce, is that with the eclipse of being by becoming, foundational institutions such as schools reduce *humanitas* (as a reference to both the Greek *philanthropia* [love of what is human] and *padeia* [education]) to the mere expression of power where the authority formerly belonging to the teacher and the 'super-human' are surpassed by the libertine and therapeutic ethos of the contemporary classroom.

Conclusion: An Education of Limits

The work of Augusto Del Noce demonstrates to us that we live in the wake of a great historical error - a political misunderstanding of the mid-20th Century that has led to a disastrous response to the fascism and authoritarianism of the time. By committing to progressive-Enlightenment ideals in the post-war era as a foil to the fascistic 'fear of transcendence', much of the world has come to accept the notion of limitlessness as the sole and inevitable trajectory of human endeavor. As Del Noce points out, the willing embrace of progressive ideology that emerged in the wake of the war, fueled by the deracinating and destructive aspects of Marxism (i.e. historical materialism), marks nothing less than the contemporary victory of the bourgeoisie and the weaponisation of desire at the expense of any reliance on the past. As Del Noce argues, '(T)he bourgeois spirit, which by nature is anti-traditional, anti-metaphysical, and implicitly anti-religious, always takes advantage of the revolution in order to reach the stage when it can manifest itself in its pure state.'⁷¹ For Del Noce, it is with the advent of

70 Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, 191.

71 *ibid.* 210.

progressive ideology that we find, for the first time, the pure state of total 'liberation', and that instead of improving the human condition, has merely established a new form of totalitarianism.

The great lesson of Del Noce about formal education is that there is both a spiritual and historico-political justification for resisting the total 'liberation' that progressivism dictates. Such resistance is dependent on educators orientating their approach to teaching and learning in a way that understands the ethical necessity of limits. In other words, in a time when the dominant ideological framework of today compels us toward endless forms of consumption, as well as economic, cultural, and identitarian novelty in the never-ending pursuit of self-realization, Del Noce helps elevate the concept of limits as the essential educational virtue of our time. He does this not as a reactionary that pines for the past, but rather as defender of metaphysical pursuits and the prioritization of being who conceives of super-humanity as the basis of an education capable of contributing to a just and healthy existence. In this way, Del Noce's work serves as a source of stabilization for educational theorists who are not only seeking a moral justification for the reclamation of metaphysics and the prioritization of the logic of being as a fundamental source of teaching of learning, but also an intellectual one as well.

While at first glance it might be easy (and somewhat predictable) to categorize Del Noce's historico-political analyses as simply an example of 'conservatism', it would also be incorrect to do so. In fact, what should be understood as 'conservatism' is that which (for better or worse) seeks to conserve what had come before. In this sense, Del Noce's defense of both tradition and authority is not at all related to 'conservative' ideology because what he seeks to defend is not 'tradition' as such, but rather that which corresponds to the 'meta-historical' nature of truth. Put differently, fidelity to 'the founding' can take either a theological form (where tradition is tied to metaphysical absolutes), or a secular form (where tradition is tied to simply that which came before). In his case, what he is advocating in the sphere of formal education is a re-engagement with the theological conception of the meta-historical as a way to confront the all-encompassing, and totalitarian nature of progressive

ideology today that impedes our capacity to provide students with a moral sense that they belong to something greater than themselves and their individual pursuits of vitality, happiness, and well-being.

In conclusion, educators can utilize Del Noce's historico-political analysis of the 20th Century as a way to help us rethink the implications and impact of progressive ideology on what appear to be almost 'unquestioned' ideas about the role of teachers, students, and curriculum in formal education today. Instead of committing ourselves so unceasingly to the newest trends emerging out of the current progressive educational ethos, we might do well to follow in the footsteps of Del Noce and look toward limitations in teaching and learning not as barriers to be overcome in the process of student self-fulfilment, but rather as their very precondition. Ultimately, it is in the writing of Del Noce that we find a powerful justification and rationale for educational theorists and practitioners to re-engage with ideas about tradition, authority, theology, and the meta-historical within the context of formal education once

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