

Utopia and Reality: the “culture” of politics in Rodolfo De Mattei

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Abstract: *This work aims to deal with the composite reflection of the historian of political doctrines Rodolfo De Mattei (1899-1981) about the subject of utopia, going through some moments of his researches on 17th century political literature, between treatises about reason of State and the tradition of political utopia. The judgement on the literary-political utopian kind turns out to be perfectly consistent with the scholar's more general conception of politics, expressed in some key essays of methodological character, which appeared during the thirties of 19th century, about the history of political doctrines discipline role and aim. It is in fact a critical perspective which is a rethinking of some traditional classifications, such as those of realism and idealism, that centres around the worth of the historical process and the lead of an ethical approach to politics, which always relies on the mediation of multiple forms and manifestations of culture.*

Keywords: *Utopia, Realism, Ethics, Politics, Renovation.*

*E cos'è, poi, questa 'autonomia della politica'? La politica, magari laddove appare più scientificamente e categoricamente dedotta, è sempre in funzione del problema morale.
(R. De Mattei, 1938)*

Utopia as an ethical-political project

Ma per fortuna gli stessi dissacratori dei miti e degli ideali, gli stessi differenziatori degli schemi dai programmi pratici, finiscono, volenti o nolenti, col convenire sulla forza

storica di tali ideali, che per essere espressione di uomini e di tempi, sono anch'essi realtà viva, provvista di efficacia e di proiezione sulla vita pratica. La Repubblica platonica è, sì, un programma massimo, ma sempre un programma, cioè un verbo che tende a farsi carne, ed altrettanto ben può dirsi del sogno campanelliano: quanto poi all'effettivo fascino riscosso da detto schemi, si possono rammentare gli sforzi, le aspirazioni, le cospirazioni consumate per l'attuazione pratica dei vari disegni.¹

With these words, Rodolfo De Mattei introduced the concept of utopia, underlying those of myth and political ideal, in his treatise on the method and aim of the history of political thought. We are in 1938 and the Sicilian professor is immersed in the folds of a debate on the epistemological statute of his discipline.² His position is clearly anti-idealistic, polemical against ‘la pregiudiziale “scientista” e positivista’,³ and the doctrinaire notion of the discipline expressed, among others, by the Gentilian Felice Battaglia in 1936, in his *Lineamenti di storia delle dottrine politiche*. It is a critical perspective chosen in a lively argument among philosophers of law, philosophers of politics, scientists of politics, historians of philosophy. In his claiming the distance between the history of thought and other subject matters, such as political science, which aimed at ‘fornire la conoscenza esatta delle leggi regolanti la natura sociale dell’uomo’, De Mattei goes in search of the political in multiple manifestations of man’s life in history, which include literature, poetry, theatre, art. In this sense, putting distance both between the excesses of science, and the conceptual rarefactions of doctrines, he proposes to join the practical dimension, realistic, of politics with its theoretical expression, receiving witnesses of various kinds, which marked relevant stages in the historical process of social and civil life. As it was already underlined, it was not a matter of reducing the history of political thought to a

history of culture, but of keeping the theoretical aspect and the practical together of knowledge, recording the manifestations of civil life, of a literary kind, juridical, economic, religious, established in a well-defined historical framework. The history of political thought was in fact intended as history of heterogeneous reflection on reality and on political-social activity and, so, as history of the process of human civilization.⁴ From a theoretical scope defined as such, not could be excluded myths, ideologies, utopias, which held an extraordinary historical force.⁵

The interest towards the kind of utopia, which leads De Mattei, in the immediate post-war period, to comment works such as Harrington’s *La Repubblica di Oceana*, Zuccolo’s *La Repubblica d’Evandria*, Campanella’s *La Città del Sole*, and to turn his attention to lesser witnesses of the utopian tradition, is consistent with a broader view on politics and its aims, which had grown a theoretical solidity right in the course of the lively debate on the study of political doctrines in Italy. Historian Carlo Morandi, from whom De Mattei also drew inspiration, reflecting upon the evolution of political thought in the field of ‘philosophical-historical disciplines’, acknowledged that the distinctive trait of political utopias was in being somehow out of their time because replete of future.⁶ An idea, this one, that De Mattei for sure approved to the extent of reading in utopia not something unreachable, but a heartfelt projection of the

possible, which however held a link with religion, not intended in the denominational sense, but as transcendent dimension intrinsic to man, his spirituality, an essential component of his matter, of his *humanitas*. The utopian tradition origins themselves, which De Mattei distinguished between utopianism with a “citizen” background and “universalistic” utopianism, were to be searched also in well-established cultural traditions, such as Neoplatonism and Christian Humanism.⁷ Truly in his historiographical researches about political thought, the scholar would reaffirm the connection between utopia and religion, in the name of a modern conception of man, observing that *non vi è utopia che non abbia in sé un carattere religioso; e non perché sia connessa, come pur è possibile, a una data credenza metafisica, ma perché provvista di quella sua assolutezza che le conferisce appunto una fisionomia e un'esigenza mistica, sì che necessariamente si arricchisce di quel pathos che è della medesima natura del fervor di religione. Pathos, fervore, peraltro, che si riscontrano ugualmente, magari di più, presso i programmi politici per avventura ispirati a una visione 'realistica' della vita: appunto per ciò, sorretti da mistica sicurezza, da religiosa assolutezza. E se nell'utopia' è già – come generalmente si dichiara – qualcosa della realtà o della realtà futura, non v'è dunque utopia senza realtà, che sarà futura nell'attuazione, ma è già presente nella elaborazione, e quindi*

*a suo modo sempre attuale. Sempre attuale, forse a preferenza dei programmi contingenti, proprio perché a carattere permanente, cioè perché appunto interessando l'universalità, tocca la parte generale ed eterna dell'uomo.*⁸

This passage enables to understand the ostensible paradox of the likeness between utopia and realism that De Mattei proposes again in many of his studies about Italian political tradition between the Renaissance and the Baroque age. Even in Machiavelli, father of the tragic separation between ethics and politics, pioneer of modern political realism, a markedly anti-realistic attitude, according to the scholar's judgement, can be found in the integral dedication to the classical paradigm of Roman *respublica*. According to the Florentine Secretary – son of that Humanistic tradition, soaked with the cult of Classics –, who trusts in the permanent effectiveness of the model, the political exemplarity of Rome becomes timeless, universal, not bound to any judgement whatsoever, prudential in kind, of contingency.⁹ It is as if De Mattei meant to underline that it does not exist a neat break between realism and utopia in the Italian political tradition, in the right of nature itself of that tradition, marked by various cultural ancestries. In many works, since 1924, the scholar stigmatises the realism-utopianism dialectic comparing, for example, Machiavelli and Campanella, the mundane author and the metaphysical, though convinced

that they represent the two poles of a national political culture of great complexity, but “spiritual” in character, made of possible oscillations of thought, but never of definitive contrasts.¹⁰ Actually, according to De Mattei, the modernity of the writers of the national tradition modernity, their historical continuity, is explained through that combination which crosses a vast political literature among ‘domestic experience’, practice of reality, and bookish experience.¹¹ A vitality that still allows thinking about a cultural identity suspended between utopia and reality.

Also Utopia, which for De Mattei, therefore, is to be thought as an ethical experience, not necessarily as a critical imagination of an ideal elsewhere. Utopia is the possibility that refers to the value of a project, of a model of perfecting potentially achievable. In this perspective, the city of Rome, which is an authentic muse in the Sicilian scholar’s scientific and artistic imagination, can be thought as a place of utopia par excellence, because it embodies a reality in precarious equilibrium between immanence and transcendence, between ancient history, from which civilization descends, and the eternal history of Christianity, in its ideal projection that refers to a universal set of rules. Rome, in a synthesis between a glorious historical memory and the spiritual dimension’s eternity, is the place where De Mattei’s political view becomes concrete. The Eternal City, in its

being universal and not personal, hints at politics to be intended as a project, up to utopia, never resolved in the immediacy of aims, in the techniques to preserve the “reason of States”. Rome is the place of historical memory, but also the location of a universal spiritual order, to which to refer human political order, finite and contingent, paying reverence to a view of politics, maybe even impolitic, as a project that procures, *in primis*, man’s moral improvement.

Utopia, therefore, represents one of the forms through which De Mattei rethinks and makes it relative the idea of politics finiteness, as politics is a subject that refers to the complexity of human nature, to its being irreducible to a single dimension. What De Mattei celebrates throughout all his literature, it is a strongly ethicised version of politics, which spreads its roots deep into an image of man matured right after a precise reading of the Humanistic tradition, effectively expressed by Petrarch, a pioneer of Modernity. In the definition of a politicality of the Aretinian poet, condensed in the pages of the long essay *Il sentimento politico del Petrarca* (1944), De Mattei insists on the character of that great cultural revolution that places in the centre an unprecedented view of man, marked by Petrarch’s contribution. De Mattei writes: *nel Petrarca è l’homo’ che trova la sua celebrazione, l’individuo che, in quanto creatura, prima ancora che farsi membro di consociazione politica, ha in sé la sua possibilità di*

*redenzione e di perfezione, magari al di fuori della società. E quasi contro la 'civilitas' dantesca, è l' 'humanitas' che viene rivendicata e onorata.*¹² From Petrarch, therefore, a new view of man would derive, inspired by the great human models, educated on the virtues of the Classics and Christianity, on the lesson of Cicero and Augustine, who does not conceive politics as a space devoid of those virtues themselves. Also through this interpretation, De Mattei's remarkable attention for the research of civil life's moral value is confirmed, for the constitution of a spiritual dimension, and not a naturalistic one of the political man, which opens for a new age, for a modernity whose father is Petrarch.

Discontinuity of the utopian tradition

De Mattei therefore seems to turn his attention to the kind of utopia moved by a fundamental curiosity. He interests himself in those numerous manifestations of civil literature that deal with the subject of politics embracing an ideal dimension, metaphysical and not only hyper-realistic. In this direction, he also inspects expressions less known and theoretically less structured of the utopian kind: it is enough to think about the *Repubblica delle Api* di Giovanni Bonifacio, judged as a 'contributo ambizioso',¹³ from which yet does it emerge the curiosity of the scholar who however

distinguishes those lesser witnesses from those well settled in the line of thought that from Plato arrives to Thomas More.

Between 1944 and 1953, De Mattei edited the "Collana degli Utopisti" for publisher Colombo in Rome. In this period *La Repubblica d'Evandria* di Ludovico Zuccolo, *La Repubblica di Oceana* di James Harrington, *La Città del Sole* di Tommaso Campanella are published with his preface.

Extremely indicative of a view on utopia as political theory is what De Mattei writes in 1947, exactly in the preface to the most well-known work by Harrington: *D'altra parte, la contingenza pratica, così densa di fermenti, così suscettiva di capovolgimenti, così ricca di improvvisazioni – regimi che crollano, forme inedite che si affermano, minoranze che impongono la loro formula alle maggioranze – possono bene autorizzare qualsiasi arditezza novatrice nel campo del pensiero. E, del resto, a che scopo affondarsi nello studio delle discipline politiche, se non per ricavare fruttificazioni pel futuro?*¹⁴

From the prefaces to these works, all belonging to the 17th century classical tradition, particularly dear to De Mattei, do his theoretical constants emerge. The scholar mainly intends to lay some distinctions in the matter of utopia, referring the origin of political models and hypotheses to well-defined contexts and historical moments; secondly, he puts some distance from More's *Utopia* and concentrates his

attention on authors who go beyond a narrowly idealized view of political forms, not very concrete and almost unobtainable. It is not a coincidence that he identifies in Ludovico Zuccolo (1568-1630), an exponent of 17th century political moralists, that ‘fiuto della realtà’ which enables him not to fall into More’s “visionary” politics with its questions and contradictions.¹⁵ The Sicilian scholar’s scepticism reflects that of the politician from Faenza, critical of the idea of the exemplar city, which would be founded on the presumption of a benevolent human nature, of which he had no experience. And so De Mattei, in the author of *Repubblica d’Evandria* (1625) doesn’t recognise a utopian, but a reformer who, although attracted by the optimum State ideal, has reached, thanks to experience and study, the primary value of the historical process and the belief that the solidity of political models is measured by means of proofs, and not desires.¹⁶ In his reflections on the political thought of authors like Campanella and Zuccolo, De Mattei therefore insists on the ‘dramatic nature’ of a time in history when the difficulty of reconciling the reason of State urgent logic with ideal government forms, which then turns into a political doctrinarism torn between experience and imagination. The statement of such a limit reveals the scholar’s difficulty in thinking about the political utopia widespread in the 17th century, especially the citizen one, as a tradition

flattened onto the ideal dimension. He is convinced instead that that tradition should be examined in its composite nature, which reflects the anguish of an era.

Even Campanella, more esteemed for the *Monarchia di Spagna* rather than *La Città del Sole* is not abstractly utopian, to De Mattei’s eyes, but he is a utopian in his rejecting an iper-realistic model of politics. About the ‘metaphysical’ Campanella, who looks at politics through moral directives and universal virtues, De Mattei remarks: *Il suo lirismo, è, del resto, nella stessa opera politica, nella commozione delle sue visioni universali, nell’innocenza dei suoi sogni generosi e si manifesta in espressioni abbandonate in cui Machiavelli non cadrebbe mai.*¹⁷ In many places, the Sicilian scholar, in fact, strives to correct the *vulgata* of a utopian Campanella recognising, especially in works like the *Monarchia di Spagna* or the *Aforismi politici*, the more politically meaningful texts by the author from Stilo. He intends, in this way, to describe the complexity of the author’s critical landscape, the depth and complexity of his thought, yet meaning to emancipate Campanella from the image of the Renaissance philosopher, in order to underline his stature as an authoritative exponent of an Italian political culture history. The work made in this direction is never devoid of an extremely attentive critical-philological coverage of Campanella’s papers, essential for identifying in

advance the documentary materials to study.¹⁸ There is no doubt that, dealing with Campanella, De Mattei resorts to the utopian attribute with great care, and underlining, above all, a specific meaning of the term, by means of which he intends to establish the connection of the author from Stilo with 'l'orientamento metafisico-dottrinale dello spirito del tempo'.¹⁹

Even in the preface to the Colombo edition of the *Città del Sole* of 1953, the intention of containing the importance of the most famous political treatise by the author from Stilo is immediately evident, as it can be learned even from the preface title, which reads: *La Città del Sole nel quadro dell'opera e dell'epoca di Tommaso Campanella*. *La Città del Sole* does not cover entirely Campanella's thought and, however, according to De Mattei, it cannot be thought as a proof that is separate from the rest of the author's production and from the historical environment of origin.²⁰ The Sicilian scholar's intention, therefore, consists in tempering Campanella's utopianism, referring it to a spiritual framework chronologically defined,²¹ marked by the contradictions of the post-Tridentine phase. The work, however, would maintain the marks of its connection with a rich patrimony of cultural sources and suggestions, obtained from the classical tradition and from the more recent one of modernity. In this direction, even the idea of *comunità esemplare* is considered

by De Mattei a legacy of the humanistic-renaissance culture. Moreover, in the pages of the *Prefazione*, the scholar underlines affinities, but above all the distance separating Campanella's work from Plato's *Repubblica* and More's *Utopia*. From the comparison between texts a greater proximity between Campanella's model and Plato's emerges. Especially on the subjects of harmony, identity of thought, absence of servitude and of religious disputes, uniqueness of cult, De Mattei is more inclined to identify an ideal proximity between Campanella and the ancient philosopher. Actually, the scholar is more interested in rejecting easy references to present times, informal comparisons and possible analogies between *La Città del Sole* and other proofs, different for traditions and political cultures. Particularly evident, in that sense, is the refusal to associate Campanella's political view, which is 'essenzialmente spiritualistica', to the materialistic foundations of the modern communist collectivism.²² In the difficulty of adopting traditional or scholastic classifications, De Mattei, after all, had already expressed his view in favour of Campanella's realism rather than his utopianism, reading in the *Città del Sole* a sort of 'naturalismo permeato di trascendenza'.²³ In the conclusion of his *Prefazione* of 1953, he invites to accept the work of the author from Stilo with all its ostensible contradictions and to escape the temptation

of connecting such an inconsistent model to one source, or to a codified system of thought. He, instead, invites readers to recognise the underlying inspiration of that work in an attempt to emancipate politics from reason of State and in proposing a well-defined model, almost an ideology,²⁴ of social-economic balance founded on moral requests.²⁵

Similarly, in the pages preceding Harrington's *Oceana*, De Mattei insists on the vocation for a possible change held inside a work which would inspire the political tradition of constitutionalism; a work which is anything but abstract or utopian, precisely owing to its project-oriented solidity. In reconstructing Harrington's profile, still a reformer and not a dreamer,²⁶ De Mattei not only lingers attentively on the structure of *Oceana*, but justifies the quota of idealization contained in the British philosopher's work by means of historical reasons, referring that to the tumultuous historical and political upheavals which hit England in the heart of the 17th century, underlining how contingency, rich of upturns and improvisations, had allowed courageous innovations in the field of thought and of political proposals.²⁷ Even Harrington nurtures his proposal of civil reordering on a democratic basis, which then merges into the option of a mixed set of rules, moving from the twofold datum of experience and school, of the books. The result of his reflection is anything but ideal, according to De

Mattei, as he refers his view of an exemplar community to a precise historical context, from whose analysis he even derives innovative theoretical achievements, like the recognition of an interdependence between economic and political power.²⁸ The realistic tension towards the treated matter is visible, after all, in Harrington's relationship with his sources: in the great importance given to the Machiavellian model, especially on the side of method, De Mattei identifies an analytical approach, a comparative one, devoid of preconditions and attentive to reading the changes in reality.²⁹ Even Harrington, therefore, proves De Mattei's difficulty in separating the project-related phase, the projection, the inventive imagination, from that of a disenchanted reading of politics traditionally realistic in kind, that, instead, would move on the track of its own autonomy, obeying the only laws of the State primacy. Through the *Oceana*, the Sicilian scholar goes back again to the importance of an ideal design for the improvement of society that may actually affect politics: it is a matter of recognising the value of an ideology as a program, especially among the authors of the 17th century tradition, sons of a time that gave generously intelligence and energies to make politics an exact science. Precisely referring to that context, strongly characterised in the sense of historical change, De Mattei reaffirms the importance of keeping dream, ideal, project within

politics, overcoming the distinction between utopia and reality, crossing the convention of the non-feasible construction as an answer to the decaying political reality. About this subject, he writes: *i disegnatori di comunità esemplari e di reggimenti perfetti si scandalizzerebbero della taccia di utopisti, presumendo essere disperatamente, rabbiosamente, realisti.*³⁰ Clearly, utopia, inserted into such a critical landscape, does not refer to an alien historical dimension, but to a reform intent that moves from a solid knowledge of reality, although resorting to a different expressive rule, to turn into political thought, to propose a better order compared to the existing.

Towards the renewal of man: De Mattei's realistic utopia

È illusorio che siano le istituzioni a mutare gli uomini: sono gli uomini rinnovati che rinnovano le istituzioni. [...] L'inconfondibile messaggio del Savonarola consiste in un alto e disperato appello a quel mondo morale che dovrà essere archetipo e generatore del mondo politico [...]. Su questo punto, nettissimo è il distacco del Savonarola dal Machiavelli, schernitore d'ogni tentativo mirante a migliorare la creta umana, giudicata inguaribilmente inferma; e negatore d'ogni 'repubblica immaginaria' cioè d'ogni mondo migliore. Al contrario, il Savonarola crede e spera che gli uomini siano suscettibili di

*miglioramento, e deve crederlo e sperarlo perché il negarlo significherebbe umiliare l'opera della creazione, dubitare di Dio.*³¹

In the pages of an essay of 1965 on Savonarola, De Mattei expresses in these terms the trust in man, made of ethical substance, which he derived from the Dominican friar's reflections. In that contribution the theme of spiritual renewal of individuals was given value as a premise to any government reform. It was in fact a *renovatio* that spurned, according to De Mattei, ideal or abstract political hypotheses, denying also Machiavelli's iper-realistic lesson, rooted in a substantial lack of confidence in the human nature. According to Savonarola, instead, the renewal of men, plausible and desirable, was an indispensable and trusted companion to renovate the institutions. Clearly, at the basis of this interpretation by De Mattei there was a subjective faith in a political life intended as a projection of moral life.³²

In the Sicilian scholar's overall view, if the political project takes the forms of utopia, in the sense of adopting a specific literary genre, it refers anyway to a quest for improvement, for progress. In utopian designs, he reads the confidence in the possible realization of a better society, not the dream of a model that is not achievable, suspended in time and devoid of connections with history. Judging utopia a non-place is equivalent, for the scholar, to disown the institution renewal

capabilities intrinsic to man; utopias become in this way an expression of the ideal overcoming of the contingent and of the confidence placed in a creative capability of man, which is the reflection of the divine one. In this spirit, it has been observed that utopias for De Mattei maintain a character of perennial modernity, as their being universal touches 'la parte generale ed eterna dell'uomo'.³³

The paragraph opened with a reference to the Savonarola-Machiavelli relationship; in De Mattei's studies on utopia, in fact, it is not difficult to come across the figure of the Florentine secretary. Although he never dedicated a monograph to him, the Sicilian scholar keeps in fact Machiavelli as an implicit interlocutor in many circumstances. He, not by chance, is called to represent by means of contrast a stigmatised view of politics: every reference to this author helps to mark a distance and claim a perspective where politics is bound to ethics. At the basis of De Mattei's reasoning there is the belief in the necessity to cross the *hic et nunc* of politics, which cannot be reduced to the sole materiality and immanence, and to mainly look at man's perfectibility, to the possibility that man, once 'rinnovato', improved, may affect politics. Even Savonarola, in this sense, takes the features of the anti-Machiavelli. An analogous tension animates De Mattei's early studies on Tommaso Campanella, in which the historical-philological approach to the work by the author

from Stilo is never separated from a careful analysis of the traces of anti-Machiavellism in his political thought, as to let the problem of a research for a metaphysical identity of politics come to light. One should think about *La politica di Campanella*, where a chapter of studies related to the publication of the *Nota* about the hypothesis of the plagiarism of Campanella was examined in depth, then identified as an interpolation intervention of *La monarchia di Spagna* to the *Ragion di Stato* by Botero.³⁴ In those pages, Campanella, like Petrarch later, already represented an ideal antidote to the Florentine secretary, to politics reduced to the practice of techniques and ploys needed to maintain the power.

De Mattei, evidently, also by means of the comparison between these two authors, intends to establish a precondition ethical in character that enables to deal with the political matter preferring the reasons of a superior moral order, of a subjective conscience, to those of the earthly political order. And in the case of the reflections on utopia, Machiavelli too is declared an author whose political thought can be associated with the realistic stream, following an ancient classificatory custom. The whole De Mattei's work is pervaded by this urgency, by the haste to ward off the most dangerous legacies of Machiavellism, of the effectual reality primacy, of the interest of the State and the self-sufficiency of politics.³⁵ If this ethical tension hits

the scholar's whole reflection, it becomes more accentuated precisely in the context of his studies on Counter-Reform political literature and hence also in the political utopia chapter of the 17th century tradition. As it is conveniently observed by Luciano Russi, in fact, after the Council of Trent, according to De Mattei, re-establishing the connection between ethics and politics and strengthen that between religious tradition and political authority became indispensable.³⁶

On the methodological approach level, and in a more general evaluation of the duties and goals of political thought, De Mattei makes the distinction between utopia and reality a faint one, asserting that if in every utopian construction it is already present something that belongs to a future reality, there cannot be utopia without reality.³⁷ After all this principle is consistent with the belief of the necessary relationship between the study of political ideas and that of history, which is a scientifically unavoidable precondition for De Mattei.³⁸ Moreover, the scholar, intending to reject even the distinction between the two critical streams of realism and idealism, underlines the importance of man's education that becomes fundamental especially in the moment when it is stated that the goal of an ideal State, a high point of political life, may be achieved also by means that are realistic.³⁹ Machiavelli, actually, would distinguish himself not so much for his disenchanting realism,

but for having reached a markedly pessimistic view of human nature, that would not allow imagining a spiritual redemption of man, and that would compel to look at the *verità effettuale* only, condemning any form of *immaginazione*.⁴⁰

In the different approach by De Mattei, also on matters such as the realism-idealism dialectic, clearly expressed in the pages of the well-known essay *Sul metodo, contenuto e scopo d'una storia del pensiero politico* (1938), a conception of politics emerges that is closely connected with man's experience, with the forms of participation to civil life, to historical events. This aspect shows with evidence when the scholar tries to temper a strict and doctrinaire view of his own discipline, giving value also the dramatic nature connected with the birth and evolution of a thought that reflects the complexity of human experience. About this topic, De Mattei rethinks the role of those who write and study politics: *Ciò che interessa allo studioso non è far la storia d'una dottrina, risultata "vera", ma la storia del travaglio degli spiriti in ordine alla soluzione di un problema; e a tal fine ugualmente proficua apparirà qualunque materiale di pensiero maturatosi attorno o in contrasto a quella data dottrina*.⁴¹ After all, even on the relationship between the practical and theoretical value of the history of political thought, De Mattei does not progress by means of cuts, but resorting to reconciliations. He,

actually, believes that one may not adopt those classifications that are positivistic in flavour, which tended to separate political science from any ideal political project, but he's convinced that the history of thought is to be read through a study that is "morale" in its kind, which educates the spirit to critical and comparative analysis, to historical knowledge, to the construction of a political conscience.⁴²

In the sixties, the Sicilian would come back to reaffirm the connections of utopia with reality affirming the very strong link existing between any ideal construction and the historical time when it was conceived, but deciding that the conceptual precondition of such a belief lies first in the confidence in human *perfettibilità*. If, in fact, utopia can be represented as a tree that 'eleva i suoi rami fronzuti nell'aria, ma affonda le sue radici in terra', does the awareness show that utopia, when it embodies a quest for reform or renewal, though contingent, as it is bound up to a precise historical moment, testifies a phase of human

progress, it is the expression of the possible amendment of historical experience, since, the scholar observes, *pur nei suoi aspetti inevitabilmente caduchi, l'"utopia" resta un documento non solo del cammino della civiltà, ma anche della perenne aspirazione umana a un "dover essere"*; *resta una preziosa testimonianza della confidenza dell'uomo nella sua virtù attiva, ritenuta capace di ricreare il mondo.*⁴³

This ethical view of politics, therefore, especially when it is a matter of utopia, refers to the search for virtues that are universal in the history of man and hence in politics, out of the breath of history and of strict doctrinal arrangements. De Mattei, in fact, though admitting with difficulty that utopias can be sometimes ideal constructions, even anti-historical, is convinced that these embody a perennial human quest originating from contingency, one that is endowed with great propulsive strength, and that refers to a system of virtues capable of producing the change, of achieving the ideal practically.

Notes

¹ R. De Mattei, "Sul metodo, contenuto e scopo d'una storia del pensiero politico", in *Archivio di studi corporativi*, XI, 1938, n. 2, pp. 200-36, then in Id., *Aspetti di storia del pensiero politico*, vol. I: *Dall'antichità classica al sec. XV*, Giuffrè, Milano, 1980, pp. 51-87, p. 65.

² On the forms of the participation of De Mattei in the debate, refer to R. De Mattei, "La storia delle dottrine politiche nell'Ottocento italiano", in *Scuola e cultura*, X, 1934, n. 3, pp. 248-70; Id., "La storia delle dottrine politiche in Italia nell'ultimo trentennio", in *Scuola e cultura*, XI, 1935, n. 6, pp. 424-36; Id., *Sul*

- metodo, contenuto e scopo*, cit., poi in Id., *Aspetti di storia del pensiero politico*, vol. I: *Dall'antichità classica al sec. XV*, cit.; Id., *Gli studi italiani di storia del pensiero politico*, Zuffi, Bologna, 1951.
- ³ Id., *Sul metodo, contenuto e scopo*, cit., p. 52.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 86.
- ⁵ See: S. Testoni Binetti, *La stagione dei maestri. Questioni di metodo nella storia delle dottrine politiche*, Carocci, Roma, 2006, pp. 63-64.
- ⁶ See: C. Morandi, "Lo studio delle dottrine politiche e la storia", in *Rivista internazionale di filosofia del diritto*, IX, luglio-ottobre 1929, p. 653.
- ⁷ See: R. De Mattei, "Contenuto ed origini dell'utopia cittadina nel Seicento", in *Rivista internazionale di filosofia del diritto*, IX, luglio-ottobre 1929, p. 420.
- ⁸ Id., *Sul metodo, contenuto e scopo*, cit., p. 66.
- ⁹ '[...] quella di Roma appare al Machiavelli una grande, insostituibile, perenne lezione, alla quale tutti i popoli, e principalmente i Fiorentini, dovrebbero ispirarsi'. R. De Mattei, *Machiavelli e Roma*, Istituto nazionale di Studi Romani, Roma, 1970, p. 20.
- ¹⁰ See: Id., "Campanella contro Machiavelli", in *Rivista d'Italia*, XXVII, 15 ottobre 1924, n. 10, p. 279.
- ¹¹ On this subject see also Id., "Tradizione e scrittori politici", in *Educazione fascista*, VIII, 1930, pp. 466-70.
- ¹² Id., *Il sentimento politico del Petrarca*, Sansoni, Firenze, 1944, p. 9.
- ¹³ Id., "L'esaurimento della tendenza utopistica in Italia: La 'Repubblica delle Api' di Giovanni Bonifacio", in *Studi sull'utopia*, raccolti da L. Firpo, Olschki, Firenze, 1977, p. 157.
- ¹⁴ J. Harrington, *Oceana*, con prefazione di R. De Mattei, Colombo, Roma, 1947, p. 9.
- ¹⁵ L. Zuccolo, *La Repubblica d'Evandria e altri dialoghi politici*, con prefazione di R. De Mattei, Colombo, Roma, 1944, p. 15.
- ¹⁶ See: *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.
- ¹⁷ R. De Mattei, *Campanella contro Machiavelli*, cit., pp. 278-79.
- ¹⁸ About this subject, refer to Id., *Studi campanelliani*, Sansoni, Firenze, 1934.
- ¹⁹ Id., *La politica di Campanella*, Anonima Romana Editoriale, Roma, 1927, p. 169. And again: 'A ben guardare, il quesito si scioglie da sé, sol che non si isoli la Città del Sole nella solitudine teoretica delle utopie, ma la si inserisca negli svolgimenti spirituali del secolo decimosesto. Non è possibile che l'autore degli Aforismi politici, lo scrupoloso osservatore della realtà, quegli stesso che avverte che "certe regole non riescono in pratica", e vuol che i fatti siano esaminati "per via d'istorie e non per fantasie", e non vuol parlare "di cose astratte", diventi a un tratto un sognatore solitario, un utopista: se mai le "utopie" che il suo spirito vigile gli suggerisce saran quelle utili o consone al suo tempo'. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
- ²⁰ About this subject see also R. De Mattei, *Fonti, essenza e fortuna della "Città del Sole"*, in 'Rivista internazionale di filosofia del diritto', XVIII, luglio-ottobre 1938, n. 4-5, pp. 405-39.
- ²¹ 'È lecito, dunque, concludere che la visione campanelliana non va

- considerata qual sogno solitario di un utopista, ma va collocata nel vasto quadro spirituale del tempo'. R. De Mattei, *La politica di Campanella*, cit., p. 177.
- ²² T. Campanella, *La Città del Sole*, con prefazione di R. De Mattei, Colombo, Roma, 1953, p. 26.
- ²³ R. De Mattei, *La politica di Campanella*, cit., p. 217.
- ²⁴ L. Russi, *Il passato del presente. Rodolfo De Mattei e la storia delle dottrine politiche in Italia*, Edizioni Scientifiche Abruzzesi, Pescara, 2005, p. 98.
- ²⁵ T. Campanella, *La Città del Sole*, cit., p. 27.
- ²⁶ The concept of "reformer", in this sense, refers to the notion that would be Luigi Firpo's. See L. Firpo, *Appunti sui caratteri dell'utopismo*, in N. Matteucci (ed.), *L'utopia e le sue forme*, il Mulino, Bologna, 1982, pp. 11-27.
- ²⁷ See: J. Harrington, *Oceana*, cit., p. 9.
- ²⁸ See: *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- ²⁹ See: *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- ³⁰ See: *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- ³¹ R. De Mattei, "Istanze politiche e sociali nel Savonarola", in *Studi in onore di G. Zingali*, Giuffrè, Milano, 1965, vol. III, pp. 285-316, then in Id., *Aspetti di storia del pensiero politico*, cit., pp. 277-309: p. 309.
- ³² See: *Ibidem*.
- ³³ S. Testoni, "La storia delle dottrine politiche in un dibattito ancora attuale", in *Il Pensiero politico*, IV, 1971, n. 3, p. 347.
- ³⁴ See: L. Russi, "Il Botero di Rodolfo De Mattei", in A.E. Baldini (ed.), *Botero e la "Ragion di Stato"*, Atti del Convegno in memoria di L. Firpo, (Torino, 8-10 Marzo 1990), Olschki, Firenze, 1992, pp. 454-55. On Campanella, and about his *spiritual* vocation to politics, see also R. De Mattei, *Campanella*, in *Dizionario di Politica*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma, 1939-40, vol. I, p. 376.
- ³⁵ On this subject, see also R. De Mattei, *Machiavelli e il nostro tempo*, in 'La Carovana. Rassegna trimestrale di cultura', XIX, aprile-giugno 1969, pp. 63-66.
- ³⁶ L. Russi, *Il passato del presente*, cit., p. 85.
- ³⁷ See: R. De Mattei, *Sul metodo*,
- ³⁸ 'Giusto, quindi, necessario, che lo studio delle idee politiche non vada scompagnato da quello della storia: anzi, che le idee politiche vadano storicamente rivissute, cioè, all'atto della critica, commisurate alle contingenze atte a illuminare non solo la portata di una teoria, le ragioni del suo nascimento e della sua diffusione, bensì i limiti entro cui va inteso il significato di una data terminologia, necessariamente condizionata a determinate situazioni di vita empirica'. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- ³⁹ See: *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- ⁴⁰ See: *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.
- ⁴¹ See: *Ibid.*, p. 72.
- ⁴² See: *Ibid.*, p. 75.
- ⁴³ R. De Mattei, *Antologia degli utopisti e dei riformatori sociali*, Edizioni "Ricerche", Roma, 1960, p. 8.

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