



# THE MISCARRIAGE OF THE WORLD

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It is remarkable that as early as 1918 Oswald Spengler published his magnum opus, *The Decline of the West*, a work of prophetic anticipation in two volumes, which deals with the decline of Western civilization propitiated by mollitude, hedonism and the cult of money, which turns the masses into passive and vulnerable objects, subjected to totalitarianism, whether tacit or explicit. Spengler's reflections in the form of cultural pessimism were continued, after the interregnum of Caesarisms following the First World War and the subsequent cataclysm of the Second World War, by thinkers, such as the Italian Augusto Del Noce, who questioned, through a transpolitical reading highly relevant to the current situation of the world, the ethical legitimacy of the world's social model, the ethical legitimacy of the social model of liberalism, in which capital becomes an end in itself, and the subject ends up being reduced to an object whose function is limited to being part of the productive processes of an economistic system, whose *raison d'être* is to grow and reproduce *ad infinitum*.

"In saying this we also affirm that current history is nothing other than the explicit contradiction of Marxism—when taken, in effect, to its extreme, the moment of historical materialism, as an affirmation of total relativity, and the dialectical moment, as a revolutionary principle, must be dissociated; and historical materialism thus separated from dialectical materialism invaded the West. There, where culture is characterized by the hybris of the sciences of man, hybris in the sense that such sciences want to replace philosophy—sociology, psychoanalysis and, today, above all, structuralism" (Augusto Del Noce, *Agonia della società opulenta*).

The central premise of Augusto Del Noce is the radical refutation that the reality of the human being can be understood only in terms of material subjectivity, but that such reality, in order to be endowed with meaning, must be understood on the basis of what man thinks of his relationship with the world in which he is, and with what transcends that world. There is in this postulate a notable coincidence with the affirmation of [Xavier Zubiri](#), in the sense that the self is not only not the only reality, but that egocentrism opens up a split, characterized by the agonisms of the self and the "you" and the "them" and the "us," which have as a consequence that there are no genuine relations between persons, since every individual is seen by other individuals primarily as an instrument of his own realization, and in such a way that the validity of man is subordinated to the principle of result (the important thing about man is what he does), opening a gap that cannot be closed without recourse to an intercession necessarily free of egotism: "...in the sense that everything acquires meaning only for that which can become an instrument of affirmation of the particular subject, in the egoistic sense, and which reciprocally can subsist only insofar as it is used by others" (Del Noce, *Agonia della società opulenta*).

For both authors, this mediation can only be professed by that which aims at the transcendental (the religious; that which facilitates otherness as an interest between one being and another being, the *inter-esse* according to the formulation of [Emmanuel Lévinas](#)). This assertion serves Del Noce as a basis for sustaining that the systemic desacralization carried out by liberalism prevents this mediation, since by engaging in anthropological simplifications based on immanent interpretations of the course of history, they usurp the role of the sacred in transcendent religion, transferring it to the political field, in which by definition the subjective takes precedence.

Del Noce goes even further, arguing that modern secular political theologies (heirs of that [Kantian theorem](#), according to which every material practical principle is necessarily empirical, and therefore a reflection of the subjective impression it makes on us, lacking a fortiori the objectivity required to form the backbone of a moral law), are incapable of grounding human free will on an objective moral basis, it ends up paving the way for the absolutist and arbitrary imposition of relative and contingent moralities: "...after Christianity, the category of two essential philosophical forms, Christian thought and Rationalism, were conditioned by an initial position regarding the original fall. Now, there is a third form of thought that claims to be constituted without this option, Empiricism, essentially specified by the distinction between the verifiable and the unverifiable; on account of which not only knowledge, but morality and politics could be organized independently of any hypothesis about suprasensible reality" (Del Noce, *Il problema della modernità*, p. 294).

According to this argument, the omission of objective (i.e., transcendental) juridical elements leads to a purely formalistic conception of democracy as a normative decision-making process. Let us recall that, according to [Hans Kelsen](#), "democracy is procedure, and only procedure," a principle [later echoed](#) by Robert A. Dahl and John Rawls.

This formalism, according to Augusto Del Noce, leaves this "pure democracy" defenseless and submissive, in the face of totalitarian vagaries. The Italian philosopher's thesis is that Isaiah Berlin's [secular consecration](#) of negative freedom, which he expresses by arguing that "the defense of freedom consists in the negative end of preventing the interference of others," translates in practice into a propensity to reduce moral ties to their minimum expression, which in turn creates the social conditions that feed a breeding ground favorable to the flourishing of expressions of vitalist essentialism.

Such vitalism (which is ultimately controllable, and therefore manipulable), conceives the human being as an "animal of impulses," whose personal traits are reducible to the biological characteristics of his

species, and which explains the importance acquired by this idea among philosophical currents, such as [eliminative materialism](#), and psychological ones, such as [behaviorism](#), whose shared foundation is that the science of the mental should not pay attention to the consciousness, but focus on stimuli and the verifiable responses they generate, since it is this pragmatic knowledge that allows human behavior to be conditionable, without the need to resort to the use of brute force to achieve certain ends.

A clear example of this can be found in the "[Nudge Theory](#)" of the American Richard H. Thaler, which earned him the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2017, for "his contribution to behavioral economics". Thaler's work is far from being unknown in the world of political science, as was amply demonstrated during the confinements decreed following the pandemic outbreak of 2020, proof that in our times, it is possible to affirm that the maximum value of a democratic system is linked to the idea of non-violence, and at the same time to establish the necessary conditions to subordinate the moral legitimacy of the means applied to the ends pursued, thanks to a conformity obtained through a highly sophisticated—formally impeccable—manipulation of social behavior, and the gradual neutralization of the social dialectic, which resituates political conflicts in the sphere of economic competition in order to [depoliticize](#) social antagonisms in a substantive way.

The latter, according to Jean-Claude Michea's [thesis](#), obliges liberal states to promote a kind of permanent cultural revolution, with the aim of gradually eradicating the cultural, religious and political obstacles that hinder the advance of the commodification of all facets and aspects of human life—as Carl Schmitt (1932, p. 58) put it, liberalism being the child of liberalism and the son of liberalism and the result of liberalism. 58), liberalism being the child of economism, one of the pillars on which it is based is the "economist materialist objectivity," which, in the end, has as a consequence that the reason of State ends up being little more than a pure mercantile reason.

As Del Noce points out in this regard, such a state of affairs reveals the existential danger of emptying democracy itself of its moral content (*democrazia vuota del sacro*), as it becomes a kind of gnosticism accessible to a select group of "initiates," experts who, having previously denied the existence of a transcendent reason, and therefore the very existence of a supernatural order, arrogate to themselves the mission of creating a universal but immanent reason that will bring order to an anarchic world that they characterize as the fruit of chance. Consequently, this [technocratic gnosis](#) that characterizes the modern manifestations of political liberalism is, before being an economic model and a political regime, an expression of a vision of the totality of the earthly world, which, being conceived in mechanical terms ([Walter Rathenau](#)) assumes, by extension, human consciousness in a mechanistic key ([Kurt](#)

Breysig).

This is why Del Noce warns against the complacency of abandoning oneself to contractualist, theoretical frameworks, and warns against the risk of relegating political representation to technocrats, who give absolute value to quantitative normativity, formal rather than substantive; which, in their most radical expressions, decay into a performative quasi-fundamentalism, consisting of a self-referential and self-justifying democratic liturgy, in which we can easily find similarities with the "cargo cult," both in its ritualistic aspects and in the voluntarism that underlies it, consisting, in short, in denying the limits of human reason in order to undertake a rebellion against reality.

Naturally, this ritualism, no matter how voluntaristic it may be, cannot escape the reality of being plunged into crises of authority, which, in the first instance, derive from a crisis of truth. This is inevitable when the idea of ontological truth is unacceptable, because then there is no basis for accepting the concept of objective legitimacy, nor, consequently, for establishing a hierarchy of values in an absolute and perennial key—what politics gives, politics takes away, by the grace of the general will.

The demonstrated incapacity of the liberal democracies in force to establish a true secular religion (alternative to the true one), which serves as a prop for a political system whose main attribute is the sacralization of absolute relativism. From this consecration it follows that tolerance of difference ends up being hypostatized as the highest value, at the price of renouncing the moral authority of values, equating the value of all of them. In this way, the values of the political system, such as the aforementioned tolerance, are placed before the values of man, which are demoted to the category of personal choices without intrinsic validity, but subjective, and therefore relative, since every individual is free to determine his own values, with the exception of those who deviate from the liberal orthodoxy. It is obligatory to quote Carl Schmitt (1932, p. 57), who said that, by virtue of the "ethical pathos" of liberalism, the individual is the Alpha and the Omega; "terminus a quo et terminus ad quem."

The normative ambiguity that results from this, together with the lack of common purpose that emerges from this moral pluralism, lead, according to Del Noce, to the elaboration of the myth of the affluent society as a substitute for religion and destiny, since the realization that freedom is not properly a movement, but rather being able to move (and that, therefore, the substantive issue is where to move to and what for), makes it essential to determine an attractive goal that justifies this commitment to freedom at all costs. Truly existing liberalism believes to have found this goal in the story of a sustained and unlimited material progress, supposedly attainable, thanks to the infinite capacity presumed to

homo technicus to multiply fish and loaves (even though natural resources are finite); that aspires to a future golden age in which moral virtue will be obtained, not through the perfection of the person, but thanks to the economic well-being of the individual.

Reaching this utopia is proving elusive, however, awakening doubts that lead us to believe that the very idea of a future, with or without an earthly paradise, is elusive. It seems undeniable that the affluent society has made the world so instantaneous that time and space have ceased to have meaning, and where reality is so complex, intertwined, and informatively overwhelming, that its becoming has become unpredictable and unsettling.

All of which has brought us to a point where, for lack of a more propitious scapegoat, we hold the leaders we ritually choose responsible for our anxieties, accusing them of devising a political praxis even more stupid than that exercised by their predecessors, when, in truth, what is probably happening is that they are as incapable of seeing where this [misguided world](#) is heading as we are ourselves.

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[Featured](#): *Office in a Small City*, by Edward Hopper; painted in 1953.

