

Dragonetti. The thinker of virtue

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During this week of mourning we wanted to interrupt the usual course of the words in our handbook of civil economy to express our solidarity with the city of Aquila (Abruzzo, Italy). This article remembers one of its citizens who is among classic civil economy authors, Giacinto Dragonetti, Aquilan marquis whose historic palace was among those damaged by the earthquake.

Giacinto Dragonetti is the author of a small but very successful book in pre-revolutionary Europe: *Delle Virtù e de' premi* (Of Virtues and Rewards), associated with the celebrated *Dei delitti e delle pene* (Of Crimes and Punishments) by Cesare Beccaria. In fact, Dragonetti's book widely circulated during the 18th century. The book first came out in Naples under an anonymous author in 1766. It was then published in French (1767), in English (1769), in German (1769) and in Russian (1769).

I found a Spanish edition from 1838, and I don't leave out the possibility of other editions. Dragonetti was, therefore, more frequently translated than his teacher Antonio Genovesi, and (if you don't count Beccaria), it is not until Pareto in 1900 before another Italian scholar of social sciences earns such international notoriety.

With a juridical background, Dragonetti was interested both in economy and in juridical themes. As a youth, and soon after the publication of Beccaria's *Dei delitti e delle pene*, he published that small book which aspired to complement and develop Beccaria's thesis.

In the introduction of the book, it says, "Men have made millions of laws to punish crime, and they haven't established even one to award virtue." Dragonetti proposed a true piece of legislation to award virtues, even including a code of virtues to accompany the penal code. "The Roman legislators," he said, "knew about the need for reward. They hinted at it, but they did not have the courage to codify it." Then, he added, "talking about awarding obliged virtue will not be a lost cause in this century, believed to be destined to render the respective human rights in their original effectiveness."

Obviously, Dragonetti did not deny the importance of punishments. On the contrary, he recognizes their essential role. He believed, however, that aiming only at punishment of crimes was not sufficient to put his country on the road to civil and economic development. But what is virtue?

For Dragonetti, virtue is associated with the direct and intentional research of the public good. When someone acts for "the other's advantage", we're then dealing with virtue. He said, "One calls virtue all actions which regard the interests of others or that prefer the other's good above one's own", (pg. 7). Virtues must be awarded: "As virtue is a product not of the law's command but of our free will, society does not hold a true claim over it. Virtue doesn't enter into the social contract, and if you don't award it, the society commits a similar injustice as those who defraud others' hard work" (pg. 11-12).

The "prize" therefore is a reward for the action that goes "beyond" contracts and laws. It's a reward to a substantially free act. "It's true," says Dragonetti, "that all members of the state should be governed by the law, but it is also without a doubt that Citizens should be distinguished and awarded, in proportion to their free services."

Pages and ideas of great value and current relevance, which give homage to the Aquilan lands. In his theses, Dragonetti always wrote "Citizen" with a capital C. While writing, I thought of the many from Abruzzo (and not only) who in these days are showing that today the capital C in Citizen is more than ever appropriate, just as before.

That these civil virtues, still alive in Abruzzo, although not always adequately recognized and awarded, be the start of a rebirth among those noble lands.

Next week's word: Capital.