



Vittorio Possenti



Date of Birth 25 March 1938

Place Rome (Italy)

Nomination 17 March 2003

Field Political Philosophy

Title Professor

Most important awards, prizes and academies

Member of the National Committee on Bioethics, Rome (1999-2013); Founder and Director of Venice University Interdepartmental Research Centre on Human Rights; Founding Member of Institut International Jacques Maritain (1974); Member of the Pontifical Academy of Saint Thomas Aquinas; Director of the Institute for Philosophical Studies, Milan (1975-1981); Consulting Member of the Pontificium Consilium pro Dialogo cum non-credentibus (1992-94); Member of the Scientific Committee of the "Centro Studi Filosofici di Gallarate"; Member of the editorial Board of the journals *La società* (Verona), *Sensus communis* (Rome), *Per la filosofia* (Rome). Editor and Director of the series *Annuario di Filosofia* (1996-2011); Editor and Director of the series *Filosofia e scienze umane* (1979-2000). "Salvatore Valitutti International Prize" for the book *Il nichilismo teoretico e la 'morte della metafisica'* (1996); 'Capri san Michele Prize' for the book *Religione e vita civile* (2002).

Summary of scientific research

The main subjects of my research have focused on social philosophy, the human person and on theoretical philosophy.

1. In the first domain an effort has been made for the scientific restoring of political philosophy, at risk of being dissolved by the attacks of behaviourism and of the radical social sciences. In a critical dialogue with the neoliberal and neoenlightenment traditions, the effort aimed at rediscovering such central notions as practical reason, common good, people, democracy, natural law and natural rights. With regard to contemporary political thought a constant reference has been the Church's social doctrine, considered as an important expression of public philosophy.

In the perspective of a religiously qualified "new public square" where Christianity, democracy and civilisation could meet, importance has been attached to the theological-political problem in a twin perspective: the postmodern revival of a public role for the great world religions; the assumption that in the West the deprivatisation of Christian faith could lead to a positive relation between religion and politics, different from that usual in modern times, often marked by their deep separation. Human rights (and duties) have been a constant presence in my research aiming at a better justification of them in respect of neoliberal and libertarian comprehension of human rights centred almost only on freedom rights.

2. In the anthropological domain the focus of research has been devoted to the "Principle Person" as pivotal for many disciplines. The notion and reality of person is questioned and challenged in many ways. Recovery and development of an ontoaxiological notion of person, where substance and relation are tightly connected, is capable of facing up to the biotechnologies challenges and the main bioethical problems, such as the human embryo statute, the barrier between human being and the animals, the influence and incidence of technique on human being, the libertarian claims of adults in respect of those who have no voice, and the perspective of the humanism in present times.

3. In theoretical philosophy the mainstream of my research has been devoted to metaphysical and gnoseological realism, with several insights concerning the pivotal problems of intellectual intuition, concept of being, realism and the idea of truth as *adaequatio* or conformity. These aspects have been developed through

the metaphysical tradition of philosophy of being, considered as the "third navigation", a further progress in the historical development of Western philosophy after the "second navigation" discovered by the Greeks. The philosophy of being recognizes as a zenith the thought of Aquinas and of his great followers in the 20th century, who deepened the relation between natural task of reason and supernatural election of Revelation as a criterion of opening and fostering human research.

Careful attention has been given to the problem of theoretical and legal nihilism. The former is understood as deep antirealism, refusal of intellectual intuition and oblivion of being, under the assumption that present philosophy is still lacking a sufficient answer to the crucial question: what is (theoretical) nihilism? As to legal nihilism the attention is focused on the radical legal positivism as the basis for the corresponding nihilism, according to which the law is only a production of a will, predominant in a given moment, and this entails a destruction of the very concept of law.

The perspective of the research argues the conclusion of the modern antirealist philosophy on three basic nuclei: the difficulty of modern philosophy in setting the relation between being and thought; the monopoly of science over other fundamental forms of knowledge; the indetermination in which modern philosophy has left the question of becoming. The escape from the theoretical crisis of modernity is individuated in a corresponding relaunching of the tradition of philosophy of being.

Main publications

Possenti is the author of about 35 volumes, 530 essays and several hundreds articles. His books and essays have been translated in ten languages. He has edited about 20 books and promoted the Italian translation of 15 books by Jacques Maritain, preparing for most of them an introduction. *Frontiere della pace*, Massimo, Milano 1973; *Filosofia e società. Studi sui progetti etico-politici contemporanei*, Massimo, Milano 1983; *Giorgio La Pira e il pensiero di san Tommaso*, Studia Universitatis sancti Thomae in Urbe, Massimo, Roma 1983; *La buona società. Sulla ricostruzione della filosofia politica*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1983; *Una filosofia per la transizione. Metafisica, persona e politica in J. Maritain*, Massimo, Milano 1984; *Felice Balbo e la filosofia dell'essere*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1984; *Tra secolarizzazione e nuova cristianità*, EDB, Bologna 1986; *Le società liberali al bivio. Lineamenti di filosofia della società*, Marietti, 2a ed., Genova 1992; *Oltre l'Illuminismo. Il messaggio sociale cristiano*, Edizioni Paoline, Roma 1992; *Razionalismo critico e metafisica. Quale realismo?* Morcelliana, 2a ed., Brescia 1996; *Dio e il male*, Sei, Torino 1995; *Cattolicesimo e modernità*, Ares, Milano 1995; *Approssimazioni all'essere* (Scritti di metafisica e di morale), Il Poligrafo, Padova 1995; *Il nichilismo teoretico e la "morte della metafisica"*, Armando, Roma 1995; *Terza navigazione. Nichilismo e metafisica*, Armando, Roma 1998; *Filosofia e Rivelazione*, Città Nuova, 2a ed., Roma 2000; *La filosofia dopo il nichilismo*, Rubbettino, Soveria 2001; *Religione vita civile. Il cristianesimo nel postmoderno*, Armando, 2a ed., Roma 2002; *L'azione umana*, Città Nuova, Roma 2003; *Essere e libertà*, Rubbettino, Soveria 2004; (ed.) *Maritain e Marx*, Massimo, 2a ed., Milano 1979; (ed.) *Epistemologia e scienze umane*, Massimo, Milano 1979; (ed.) *Storia e cristianesimo in Jacques Maritain*, Massimo, Milano 1979; (ed.) *Jacques Maritain oggi*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1983; (ed.) *Jacques Maritain e la filosofia dell'essere*, Il Cardo, Venezia 1996; (ed.) *Laici o laicisti? Dibattito su religione e democrazia*, liberallibri, Firenze 2002; (ed.) *La questione della verità*, Armando, Roma 2003. For a complete list of his books and a sample of his essays please refer to www.vittoriopossenti.it