

Common Good, Justice and Education

In recent years there has been a renewed interest to speak of the common good. The old and seemingly sharp distinction between private and public goods is enriched with this third long-standing concept of full and important content. Reintroducing the idea of common good also enlightens society and economy's complex situation, and aims to find ways of understanding and action in many of their seemingly intractable crossroads.

According to the traditional classification, public goods (a hospital, a school, a road, a public square) would be those whose use by a person does not rival or decrease the possibility of its use by others such as it would happen with private goods (an apple, a shirt, a car or a house). Moreover, both differentiate by the ability of the latter to completely exclude others from their use or consumption (*excludability*). Furthermore, another common approach is to distinguish the fact that public goods are provided by the State and private goods, by the market.

Despite the apparent clarity provided by these distinctions, the complexity of contemporary society is such that they have become relative and insufficient. Indeed, some public goods –such as natural monopolies, the goods produced by State enterprises or other public goods to which a fee is applied (such as toll roads)– are not rival goods but can become goods whose use exclude some people and whose ownership can be mixed.

Moreover, there are other non-rival goods, not likely to exclude some people's use (such as knowledge) which, however, are not State-owned or produced by the State. The advance of computer networks, for example, has given rise to a new class of assets which are very hard to classify such as the Internet, digital search engines and social networks. On the one hand, they are open to use without suffering many of the typical problems of rivalry or exclusivity of private goods. However, it is also true that in many cases private companies are involved in their provision. These are therefore assets that could be considered public although they are provided by private companies. At the same time, there are also computer networks within and beyond the Internet emerging as a result of the spontaneous interaction of thousands or millions of individuals who exchange information, experiences, services, etc. How should we classify these goods?

Finally, there are also goods from which no one is excluded, such as air, water and the environment in general but which may end up as rival goods by the fact that their use by some people reduces a possible future use by other people elsewhere or in the future. Moreover, the latter are not provided or owned by the State. What kind of goods are we talking about?

Given the complexity of actors, interactions, types of property, forms of provision and of exchange of goods and services which displays today's society, a second question arises: what is the right and proper way to react to this complex picture. Is it necessary for the State to intervene to sort this proliferation of goods or should it leave ample room for spontaneity and freedom in this new scenario? And if State intervention is recommended, what should it consist of?

Some argue that the private mode of possession and provision of goods and services is the fairest and/or more efficient in the case of traditional private goods, and also in the case of the goods arising as a result of the new social and technological complexity. Thus, State intervention should consist primarily in the adequate allocation of ownership of these new goods through traditional or new methods prescribed by law and the extension of market mechanisms as the primary means for their distribution. Others, however, believe that the State must intervene strongly to ensure the public nature of these goods, avoiding their privatization by the coercive force of authority and by the introduction of regulatory mechanisms that dictate and appropriate ways for their distribution.

The article *Common goods and civil economy* by Stefano Zamagni displays a third alternative option to these two opposing views. According to the Italian economist, it is inappropriate to reduce the above-mentioned goods both to the category of private goods and of public goods. Therefore, he proposes their conceptualization as "commons". Given their origin, mode of generation, characteristics and destination, these goods are considered common because they belong to everyone. In that sense, they are not private. However, due to their relational or cooperative nature, they cannot be provided or owned by a single agent such as the State. The latter results in the need for the intervention of a third actor: the civil society. Zamagni calls "civil economy" the harmonious integration of the market, the State and the civil society, in a space that includes non-functional relationships based primarily on trust, reciprocity and ethics, that forms the most suitable space for the maintenance and growth of commons.

The second article *Contingency or transcendental justice? ¿Luhmann or Höffe?* by the Chilean political philosopher Gonzalo Bustamante Kuschel presents, through a discussion between these two famous German social thinkers, two ways of conceptualizing new forms of justice in the situation of complexity of contemporary society. Following Luhmann and Höffe, the author wonders what kind of justice is necessary and possible today when the State cannot cover all social relations and provide all the necessary goods. Likewise he also questions how to achieve both a just social order and a space for the proliferation of new types of goods and relationships. According to Bustamante Kuschel, the path chosen by Luhmann is to propose the logic of functional differentiation as the central mode of organization that would spread throughout society, even in areas where common goods are displayed. Instead, Hoffe's position –apparently closer to the author's– shows the necessity of personal ethical relations as the fundamental substrate on which the commons would develop in a fair and effective manner.

The third article *Evolution and perspectives of education in Argentina, coverage and quality* by the Argentine researchers Cecilia Adrogué and Maria Eugenia Orlicki raises the status of a central common on which society holds: education. Beyond the data that emerge from this fundamentally empirical research, the authors show the deep ambiguities of the current Argentine educational system. This leads to thinking about the problems both in the actions and in the way of interrelation between its main actors: the State, schools, families and the associations of the civil society. In this sense, the educational system in our country does not seem to be up to the task of the growing demands of the complex society we live in –not only in quantitative terms but also in qualitative and social terms.

The *Essays'* section opens with a panoramic reflection on the common good with the paper *Three images of the market* by Carlos Hoewel, director of our journal. Returning to the problem of the commons from the perspective of the current social complexity we want to pose in this issue, the author shows three different types of approach to the relations between society and the market. In the first, described from the image of the city of Chicago, the market is seen as total space, following the proposal of the economic approach to human behavior of the American economist Gary Becker. In the second, starting with a quick overview of the tensions and contradictions evident in Buenos Aires' urban fabric, the author presents the frontal opposition between the market and society proposed by the Argentine economist José Luis Coraggio. In the third, inspired by the relatively harmonious integration of urban and industry in some areas of the Italian northeast, Hoewel reveals the possibility of

harmonious relations between society and the market, following Stefano Zamagni.

The second essay of this issue is *Private education: between neo-statism and civil society* by the educational specialist Carlos Horacio Torrendell, a member of the editorial board of our journal. From a positive assessment of the recognition of the fair value of private education as a "public service" in the Argentine Federal Education Act, the author shows the unusual semantic and finally real shift that this recognition has led to in recent years. The Act had the intention of breaking with the statist bias of an ethical and qualitative superiority of State education in relation to private education. However, the current discursive strategy is to conceive private education as a public service but with the aim of turning it into a fully State-controlled agency. This would mean, according to the author, a process of hidden nationalization of private education, not through traditional bureaucratic control mechanisms, but through a form of governance that would eventually destroy in practice its freedom and initiative. In this sense, and in line with a "civil" concept of education, Torrendell proposes to rethink the educational system as a common good that combines in a balanced manner all stakeholders, avoiding a return either to a statist as to a market oriented view of education.

Finally, we present the essay *Civility and happiness in the thought of Juan Hipólito Vieytes* by Alvaro Perpere, editorial secretary of our journal. The main thesis of the essay is the existence of a civil tradition in Argentina, prior to our independence that illuminates various aspects of the relations between the economy and society. From his role as an organizer of the May Revolution, Hipólito Vieytes holds, according to the author, a conception of society in which relationships of civility, that include a reciprocal recognition of the others as citizens, become central for both economic and institutional development.

The purpose of this issue is then to show, through various successive approximations, the complex nature of the common social good and its projection both to the economy and to other areas strongly linked to it today, such as education. While for a large part of Modernity a strong dualism between the State –as the almost absolute incarnation of public good– and the market –as fundamental means of achieving private goods– prevailed, the current scenario appears to show the need for a way out to this rigid dichotomy. In this regard, *Cultura Económica* tries to collaborate in the elucidation of a third alternative that can combine, without losing the proper place for each, the roles of the State, the market and civil society, in order to reach a harmonious realization of public, private and common goods.

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