

**HUMANISM AND RELIGION
IN THE HISTORY
OF ECONOMIC THOUGHT**
**Selected Papers from
the 10th Aispe Conference**

**edited by
Daniela Fernanda Parisi
Stefano Solari**

FrancoAngeli

*Collana di studi e ricerche
dell'Associazione Italiana per la Storia
del Pensiero Economico - Vol. VI*

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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|--------|
| Humanism and Religion in Political Economy: Introduction, <i>by Daniela Parisi and Stefano Solari</i> | pag. 9 |
| I. The Economic Agent: Insights and Debates from the History of Economic Thought | » 19 |
| The individual in recent economics: internalist and externalist conceptions, <i>by John B. Davis</i> | » 21 |
| Economics and Laicism. The struggle for a “humane discipline”, <i>by Fabio Masini</i> | » 42 |
| Approbation and the desire to better one’s condition in Adam Smith: When the desire to better one’s condition does not better one’s condition and society’s condition... <i>by Maria Pia Paganelli</i> | » 59 |
| Humanism, Evolutionism and economics: the evolutionary agenda in the history economic thought, <i>by Óscar Vara Crespo, Jorge Turmo Arnal, Ángel Rodríguez García-Brazales</i> | » 76 |
| The School of Salamanca: some thoughts on the subject of justice, <i>by Cecilia Font de Villanueva</i> | » 96 |
| Human capital theory: an anthropological critique, <i>by Luca Sandonà</i> | » 112 |
| II. The Catholic Perspective and Economic Analysis | » 123 |
| Is there a Catholic economic thought? Some answers from the past, <i>by António Almodovar and Pedro Teixeira</i> | » 125 |
| What can economists learn from Catholic social thought? <i>by Charles M. A. Clark</i> | » 148 |

| | |
|---|-------|
| The origins of Personalist economics, <i>by Edward J. O'Boyle</i> | » 176 |
| The Catholic organicism of Fedele Lampertico, <i>by Alfredo Sensales</i> | » 188 |
| The distribution of wealth in Giuseppe Toniolo's thought, <i>by Fiorenza Manzalini</i> | » 225 |
| The concept of democracy in Giuseppe Toniolo's thought, <i>by Stefano Zamberlan</i> | » 259 |
| The inseparable link between ethics and economics in Menegazzi's approach, <i>by Cristina Nardi Spiller</i> | » 275 |
| III. Approaches to Humanism in the XX Century | » 293 |
| Economic science, Humanism and Religion. The philosophical anthropology of "La Rivista Trimestrale", <i>by Duccio Cavalieri</i> | » 295 |
| Moral values and market economy: Liberalism and Humanism in Panfilo Gentile, <i>by Alberto Giordano</i> | » 318 |
| The Moral Foundations of the international crisis of the 1930s and 1940s: some reflections by Wilhelm Röpke, <i>by Ilaria Pasotti</i> | » 328 |
| Existential analytic and economic analysis in Menger, Robbins and Heidegger. Some considerations, <i>by Giuseppe Privitera</i> | » 358 |
| The "Sunset" of capitalism and new world order. Humanism and ethics in Oswald Spengler's economic thought, <i>by Salvatore Drago</i> | » 380 |
| Perroux's thought and the evaluation of the <i>coûts de l'homme</i> ", <i>by Francesca Gambarotto</i> | » 406 |
| The silent removal of the theory of social costs from current "old" institutional perspectives on the firm. Some reflections inspired by Kapp and Perroux, <i>by Pietro Frigato</i> | » 418 |

FOREWORD

This book, the sixth of the AISPE series, contains a selection of the papers presented at the X conference of the Italian Association for the Study of Economic Thought held in Treviso on March 27-29, 2008. The selection has been performed, besides on quality, according to the congruence of the content to the main theme proposed: Humanism and Religion in the History of Economic Thought.

The organisation of the conference has been possible thanks to the logistic and financial help of Fondazione Cassamarca – which hosted the event in its magnificent building of the Law Faculty of Treviso – to the financial help of the Department of Economic Sciences of the University of Padua and of the same University of Padua.

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HUMANISM AND RELIGION IN POLITICAL ECONOMY: INTRODUCTION

by *Daniela Parisi and Stefano Solari*

1. The meaning of Humanism in political economy

Humanism and religion have been two reference points for economists who expressed their perplexities on the conception of man and society adopted in mainstream economics. Waterman (2008: 22) recalls “the bitter argument between economists and human beings” during the nineteenth century, referring to the unacceptable simplification of human nature in the theories of political economists in the view of many British intellectuals (e.g. Coleridge, Wordsworth, Carlyle, Ruskin, Morris...).

The two notions present a certain ambiguity and a relative unfriendliness to the economist’s conceptual toolbox. In particular, the term Humanism has been introduced into economics with a variety of meanings by different scholars. Religion, on the other hand, is often considered a totally separate domain in comparison to the study of economics. As a consequence, we propose to include the two ideas in a single tentative framework; in this, the fundamental problem is to explain what we intend by Humanism.

Nicola Abbagnano defines Humanism as: «I) the literary and philosophical movement born in the second half of XIV century Italy and which, from Italy, spread to other European countries, constituting the origin of modern culture; II) any philosophical movement posing human nature or the limits and interests of man as a foundation» (1961: 868). As regards the former meaning, Humanism is a fundamental element of *Renaissance* when the centrality of man was claimed against medieval theo-centrism. In its many currents, the totality of humankind as a unity of body and soul and its dignity and freedom are the common aspects which derive from classical studies. Ethics is preferred to metaphysics and the historicity of man is emphasised. The latter meaning is not strictly related to the former and following Protagoras it simply implies that “man is the measure of all things”. This definition has been used by economists opposing the result of mainstream economic thinking, that is the notion of money as the measure of any human activity.

Economists who have referred to Humanism have not only claimed the centrality of humankind against medieval theological explanation; they have also sustained that man can only be understood by studying

scientifically his needs and the historical evolution of the means which satisfy them. 'Humanism' has also been used as opposed to Mechanicism and Positivism, often by referring to the classical conception of Humanities. This usage is however unsatisfactory and deserves some further specification.

In the historical phase of a new philosophical interest in Humanism (embodied by the works of Jaspers, Scheler, Sartre, Maritain...), Martin Heidegger (1946) questions the possibility of a revival of classical values by simple *studia humanitatis*. He argues for the need for developing a specific ethics programme. The aim of Humanism is to theorise the meaning of humanity as well as "to make sure" that men/women be human, where humanity is their essence. Humanism is therefore the preoccupation that men/women be free in unfolding their humanity and that they find their dignity in such an unfolding. From this position, Humanism in economics cannot be explained by the category positive/normative attributed to theorisation because Humanism introduces an ethical perspective on its object of study.

Since in essence science is a methodic and systematic reflection on experience starting from "common sense", that is to say, from immediate, absolute and universal certainties (Livi, 1992), the conception of man/woman we adopt in economics is a fundamental assumption. As shown below, Heidegger (1946) affirms that the *studia humanitatis* have always rooted "human essence" in different principles of "human nature" and in related notions of freedom (*Freiheit*). The many currents of thought which have claimed the need for a new Humanism in economics have conceived this "human essence" differently. Marx identifies human nature in social interaction and theorises a new, materialistic relationship between man and labour. Christians, and in particular the studies following the work of John Paul II, have identified it in Christian anthropology, which defines the person in relation to *deitas*. For many other scholars human essence lies in *animalitas*, i.e. in the phenomenology of man's biological peculiarity; this is the typical standing of anti-clerical scholars as Kropotkin (1922) or of evolutionary theories described by Vara Crespo et al. in this volume. In addition to that, Heidegger also considers the determination of *homo humanus* a metaphysical issue. Arnaud Berthoud (2008, p.14) further specifies that «dans tout ce qui relève du monde des hommes, l'essence implique aussi un sens». Therefore, philosophical anthropology represents a fundamental issue for economic theorising, and it is hardly transformable into a scientific object of inquiry.

It is controversial whether authentic Humanism is inevitably Christian – as argued by Thomas More and Erasmus from Rotterdam. Certainly, as argued by De Lubac (1992: 322), contrary to the position of Feuerbach and Proudhon, we should consider that "Christianism does not lower the status

of man by exalting God”. In this respect, Lorenzo Valla and Juan Luis Vives are two important protagonists as they shape the idea of humankind in contemporary Humanities. Giovanbattista Vico is another example of compromise between Enlightenment conceptions and Christian ethics. In these cases, and more notably in the latter, anthropology is based on values and requirements derived from moral, civil and religious praxis – as in Neo-Thomism – and not directly from Revelation.

The classical conception of natural law contributed to shaping Humanism. Mario Cattaneo argues that «*il nucleo più autentico della dottrina del diritto naturale, il motivo essenziale che dà valore e significato al giusnaturalismo, è il principio del rispetto per la dignità umana*» (Cattaneo, 2004: 21). The distinguishing assumption is that human dignity lies in human dispositions and emotional complexity, independently from the mechanical relationships of invariant elements. Consequently, we can distinguish “biological” natural law from “moral” natural law, which is related to the ability of humankind to recognise what is good in social interaction. Only in the late eighteenth and in the nineteenth centuries an opposition between Christian – particularly Catholic – and laic interpretations of man emerged virulently.

The laic interpretation has been accused of making human beings a good themselves or of idolising nature. Elisée Reclus (1868-69), who can be considered a leading figure of this naturalistic and anarchic stream of thought, affirms that «man is Nature which has become conscious of itself». Despite inquiring on the morality, or possible immorality, of nature, this naturalistic approach adopts a positivistic attitude. Kropotkin (1902; 1922) bases his Ethics on the “mutual aid” principle which he identifies as a dominant factor in nature and as an indicator of man’s morality. In this view, nature is not amoral; on the contrary, it furnishes a definition of good and evil. In this perspective Padovan (1999) points out Kropotkin’s organic necessity for mutual aid, justice, and morals.

Differently, some scholars have recuperated the classical vision of humankind as independent from Christian religion. This is the case of Alfred Fouillée (1914) who argues that we should «develop all the faculties of our Nature subordinating always those which are only the means to those which are the real goals of humanity», and Simone Weil who frames insights on economics with a particular focus on workers’s alienation in the industrial society.

Due to the heterogeneity of the notion of 'humankind', even among those who found inspiration in the classics, the identification of economists who can be classified as tied to Humanism is particularly hard. Mark Lutz (1998) has identified a current of humanist economists in the tradition of “dissenting economists” that started with Sismonde de Sismondi and evolved in the British context through Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin and,

notably, John Stuart Mill; the latter addresses the problems of social justice and dehumanisation in the distribution effects of the competitive market system in the second part of *Principles of Political Economy with some of their Applications to Social Philosophy*. Lutz has also identified a nineteenth century evolution of this strand of thought in the ties connecting John Hobson and Richard Tawney to E. F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* (1973). To this British group should be added the humanistic tendencies expressed in the German "ethical economy" (although affected by Idealism) and in the ethical liberalism of authors as Wilhelm Röpke (as shown in an essay of the third section). We should also mention the important French tradition of social economics, including important scholars such as Gaetan Pirou and François Perroux, which was relevantly affected by the experience of Social Catholicism. The Marxist stream of Humanism has instead–developed–in the philosophical and sociological critical perspective of the Frankfurt school as well as in the Catholic (radically) communitarian view of Ivan Illich: despite the fact that economics has not been deeply affected by these perspectives, a paper in this anthology addresses the experience of the *Rivista Trimestrale* which can be considered as the legacy of Marxian Humanism in the Italian context.

Most of the economists who are said to belong to economic humanism are deeply influenced by Christian ethics (Bateman and Banzhaf, 2008: 1-19); among shared features figure a common substantive approach, a reference to the "common good"—and an attention to the discrepancy between economic accounting and humankind's ends. «In practice, the main good is the practical good which is acknowledged independently from the doctrinarian foundation: we live in society and we agree to tell our substantial principles as well to tell also those of other people, we accept to narrate and to be narrated – face to face – relatively to our personal substantive principles. If we accept this, we are on a good way to the constitution of a common morality» (Scola, 2009: 39).

Despite this common approach, especially in America the areas of rival "ethics and economics" are undeniably in competition, the former being is focused on human interconnections, the latter essentially concerning human freedom conceived in terms of autonomy and choice (Frey, 2009).

Despite all that, we agree with Karl Rahner who, in a famous 1967 conference, argued that secularity is temporal engagement in all and every dimensions; in this precise sense, the Church anticipated the process of secularisation and has preserved it in its history till today when it has succeeded to be internally "open". The world per se is ethically relevant and the Church is a wandering people which expresses and radiates its own eschatological hope in salvation in the structures of life. In fact, this was

the world of Bible, the world that humanity faces and endures, the world that – as human beings – we continuously wait for.

In this sense, it is clear that «... reality is not just empirical facts and that scientific verification is done by the human capacity to judge what is true and what it is not true, no existential truth can be discovered if the searcher tries to remain impersonal and false objective... The opposite of neutrality is a genuine recognition of subjectivity, ..., faithfulness to our authentic subjectivity is our best road to objectivity» (Gallagher, 2009).

All in all, in the past centuries several economists tried to oppose the idea that money is the measure of everything, resorting instead to Protagoras' saying that man is the measure. Their strategy was inclusive since they attempted to extend the analysis of economics to social and moral aspects. The opposite strategy was adopted by Lionel Robbins who argued (1932: 147) that “economics cannot pronounce on the validity of ultimate judgements of value”, reducing the extent of economic analysis to avoid clashing with non technical issues: sadly, Robbins' concern has been wrongly interpreted in contemporary economics; an example thereof is the conception of man and of human capital proposed by the Chicago school (discussed in the first section).

2. The unfolding of the volume

The volume collects a selection of the papers presented at the X AISPE conference held in Treviso in March 2008. Essays are grouped into three sections: the first contains reflections on the theorisation of the individual in economics; the second includes the works that discuss the Catholic perspective in political economy, with the presentation of three authors who are not well-known internationally; the third is devoted to other – non directly religious – approaches to Humanism in political economy.

In the first part, John B. Davis reflects on the recent theorising about the individual and how it has changed the way economists consider it. The paper records a series of attempts to overcome the standard utilitarian conception which fails as a representation of what an individual is. The interest of Davis is above all on the progress made with externalist conceptions based on social interaction. He consequently reviews some approaches which break off with the old atomistic conception, and in particular those in which personal identity includes social identity, which reflects historically accumulated and constructed social institutional structures.

Fabio Masini refers to Lionel Robbins to define what *laicism* means in economic studies. His essay argues that Robbins's message is much more complex than generally understood and far from determinism. Robbins fought for *laicism* in economics through a deep and strong “humanistic”

conception of the individual. Masini shows how Robbins defended the concept of “choice” from mechanistic temptations towards pure maximisation procedures and, in fact, dismissed the *homo oeconomicus* as a mere metaphor, useful only as an initial approximation of the real behaviour of human beings.

Maria Pia Paganelli helps us to see Smith as a more articulated thinker than he is usually presented. In effect, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* Smith argued that the desire to better one’s condition derives from the innate desire to receive the approbation of others. The individual was therefore considered from a relational perspective, anticipating the contemporary tendencies presented by Davis.

Oscar Vara Crespo et al. discuss the economic theorising emerging from evolutionary approaches, which in the XIX century gave birth to a humanistic view deeply clashing with religion. These authors show that there has been a long-lasting complex self-reinforcing relationship between economics and the evolutionary vision of science. There was a continuous exchange of ideas (and ideals) between economics and biology: Darwin’s natural selection process is the biological transcription of Smith’s market competition; later, the Socio-biological Project attracted economists and social scientists looking for a new answer to old problems – although common idea of the survival of the fittest tends to be highly ideological. Vara Crespo et al. investigate whether economics really fits in the evolutionary picture. In effect, both sciences are unable to explain moral and altruistic behaviour.

Cecilia Font de Villanueva focuses on the theorisation of justice, which is a fundamental notion for humanist studies. She proposes an account of the achievements of the 16th century Spanish school of jurists linked to the University of Salamanca who created a body of doctrine on natural, international and economic law. In particular, they developed Aristotelian and Thomist thought conjugating it with the more individualist and “liberal” Roman law. The foundations of modern theories of economic justice are based on their insights.

Finally, Luca Sandonà closes the section dedicated to views of mankind with a critique of the notion of human capital as expressed by the Chicago school. The author affirms that the Chicago theory of human capital is based on a totally inadequate *anthropological* understanding of man, as it overlooks man’s inclination to develop dialectically and order all the factors of his freedom.

The second section focuses on the strand of Catholic economic theorising. The first paper, by Antonio Almodovar and Pedro Teixeira, deals with the evolution of Social Catholicism from the 1830s to the post second World War period. The authors describe the methodological evolution of this heterogeneous school, pointing out that there was a fragile consensus

on the practical approach (grounding Corporatism) which characterised the school's late nineteenth century evolution. Moreover, for a number of reasons such consensus tended to fade away after the second World War.

Differently, Charles Clark tends to see Catholic social thought as more homogeneous and systematic than his Portuguese colleagues. He argues that such strand of thought does not provide an economic model or blueprint for a just economy. What it does provide is the philosophical foundations upon which such an analysis can be based, and a guidance on how we can move towards a more just economy. He consequently proposes a set of principles constituting the “ethical toolbox”, which can be fruitfully applied to economic theorising: the first two are the principles of human dignity and participation, which are too often forgotten in economic views of our society and which are at the basis of any form of Humanism; the other principles are more specific characteristic of the Catholic perspective. Most remarkably, Clark concludes with the notion of prudential judgement which connects principles to praxis, which is the very synthesis of the Catholic tradition in economic issues and is a quite different perspective from contemporary positivism.

The third essay of this section is devoted to personalist economics, that is to say the strand of Catholic thought which emerged in the U.S. in the late twentieth century as firmly based on John Paul II's view of human anthropology. Edward O'Boyle reviews this theory and connects it with the Catholic tradition. Interestingly, the author draws a set of relationships existing in the unfolding of the personalist perspective, from Heinrich Pesch to Waters and Danner, and an important connection to Schumpeter's (almost) orthodox economics; furthermore, he traces the change in the technology of communication media which he asserts affects has affected economic theorising.

The second section concludes with studies centring on three generations of Catholic scholars, from Lampertico to Toniolo and Menegazzi, all belonging to the Venetian school. A common feature of these authors, similarly to the Thomistic approach to science, is to refer to Christian values in their theories but not directly to religion as a source of truth statements.

In detail, Alfredo Sensales proposes an overview on Fedele Lampertico's unfinished treaty *Economia dei Popoli e degli Stati*. Lampertico is an exponent of the liberal and Christian culture of the Venetian élites which has also been called *paternalism*. Sensales aims to read Lampertico contribution in its historical context. The original confluence of a liberal perspective and of Catholic values produces the original theorisation of an “ethical market economy”.

Fiorenza Manzalini and Stefano Zamberlan discuss some aspects of Giuseppe Toniolo's thought. Manzalini focuses on the problem of the

distribution of wealth, reading – in the absence of systematic and specific works – his early *Lezioni*, which are a crucial point in economic theory where clearly emerge the Catholic (Thomistic) view of the human person as well as the practical science perspective.

Zamberlan focuses on Toniolo's idea of democracy. In this respect, even if Toniolo's practical approach does not lead to decontextualised generalisations, some fundamental ideas can be learned from his work. Toniolo proposed a *substantive* view of democracy as a cooperation for the common good, for the benefit of the less wealthy social strata. Moreover, democracy is interpreted as a bottom-up ordering process, from the social domain to political institutions. Zamberlan argues that in Toniolo true democracy is the result of political participation, social emancipation and economic justice. Such conditions can be achieved through cooperation, respect of hierarchical relationships and enhancement of work conditions in line with the central position of man in the economy.

Finally, Cristina Nardi Spiller presents the figure of Guido Menegazzi who, starting from the Venetian Catholic tradition, expresses some affinities with the (more or less contemporary) Freiburg school and Wilhelm Röpke. Menegazzi attempts to codify the laws that regulate human behaviour. In his view, infringement of these laws would lead to disorder and irreparable distortions of the economic and moral order. Furthermore, he considers the business cycle as the evidence of a lack of vital synergy that allows destabilising entropic forces to take over.

In the third part of the anthology essays on the non religious variety of Humanism are collected. The selected papers refer only to twentieth century economists presenting views on ethical liberalism as well as some social economics insights.

Duccio Cavalieri opens the section with a paper on the *Rivista Trimestrale*. Firstly he proposes a most accurate and detailed account of Humanism in its various meanings and tendencies in order to correctly locate Marxian Humanism. The latter has mainly produced philosophical and sociological works, although also a number of economists were affected by such a perspective. Then Cavalieri presents the traits of two Italian economists, Claudio Napoleoni and Franco Rodano, who collaborated in the *Rivista Trimestrale*. The editorial line of the journal was a positive Humanism aiming at reaffirming the intrinsic nature of human subjectivity and the social character of labour. Cavalieri affirms that for Napoleoni and Rodano Communism and Humanism were an indissoluble binomial; in Communism they saw an ethical plea for transforming the world in a humanist direction and for achieving an equalitarian and participating form of social organisation.

The second essay of this section is written by Alberto Giordano and deals with Panfilo Gentile, an exponent of Italian “ethical liberalism”.

Gentile was a protagonist of the search for a middle path between savage market economy and the deadly collectivist system, in order to combine liberty and social security. Such a “third way” should have been a *moral*, more than economic, revolution. A similar approach was that proposed by Wilhelm Röpke, an economist discussed in the contribution of Ilaria Pasotti. In this essay the relationship between Einaudi and Röpke is presented and the latter’s ideas on the humane economy are discussed, particularly from the point of view of international relations.

Giuseppe Privitera devotes his essay to Menger, Walras, Robbins and Heidegger through the use of the “existential analytic” process developed by the latter. Man understands the world in an inauthentic way. This lack of authenticity and of totality, Heidegger states, can only be resolved by facing up to the problem of death. That opens to the issue of economic scarcity which has been developed in different ways by Menger, Walras and Robbins. In this way Privitera distinguishes between existential scarcity and social scarcity.

Salvatore Drago presents the economic work of Oswald Spengler. This author represents a further variety of ethical views of the economy, strictly affected by the organic interpretations of the nineteenth century German schools.

Finally, two essays deal with François Perroux and his ethical and social view of the *coûts de l’homme*. In the former Francesca Gambarotto shows that Perroux’s career was devoted to proposing concepts and indicators able to depict the structure of the economy, starting from the relationship of individuals and institutions and from human needs. His view stressed the co-operative attitude of human beings and the fundamental role of this attitude for the functioning of the market. His ethical approach was deeply affected by Catholic values and firmly anchored to the idea of community. Perroux’s concept of the *coûts de l’homme* proposes an operationalisation of his view of human dignity. Gambarotto clearly points out how this was obtained, with a special regard for regional economics. Differently, Pietro Frigato connects Kapp’s and Perroux’s humanistic institutionalism to highlight the specificity of their perspective founded in human needs taken as a reference point for economic theorising. Such a perspective, he argues, tends to be overlooked by contemporary institutionalism which, in the words of Cavalieri, tends to adopt a “post-modern” and positive attitude. As a consequence the study of social costs today tends to become more and more formal and far from the original objectives of these authors.

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I. The Economic Agent: Insights and Debates from the History of Economic Thought