

ISSN 1974-4110 (on line edition)  
ISSN 1594-7645 (print edition)



*WP-EMS*  
*Working Papers Series in*  
*Economics, Mathematics and Statistics*

**“POLITICAL ECONOMY AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY:  
SOME (I HOPE) USEFUL NOTES”**

- Giuseppe Travaglini (Department of Economics, Society and Politics, University of Urbino)

**WP-EMS # 2022/04**

# Political Economy and Moral Philosophy: Some (I hope) useful notes

Giuseppe Travaglini

University of Urbino Carlo Bo  
Department of Economics, Society, Politics - DESP  
Via Saffi 42, 61029, Urbino (PU) - Italy

November 14, 2022

## Abstract

Political Economy, as an autonomous discipline, has a relatively recent history. From its origins, it appears to be divided into two fields, the “classical” one based on the labor- value theory, and the “neoclassical” one at the center of which is the utility-value theory. Our aim in this paper is to identify some relevant philosopher strands in economic thought that can help to disentangle the reciprocal relationships between the different economic theories, and to understand their relations with philosophy, and particularly with Moral philosophy. This can make it easier to study political economy, its social and political implications, and the not always simple relationship of the economic theory with social disciplines.

**Key words:** political economy; moral philosophy; welfare economics; social justice.

**JEL Code:** B00; B10; B40

## 1. Introduction

As an autonomous discipline, *Political Economy* has a relatively recent history that can be traced back to the seventeenth century. With the birth and affirmation of the modern mode of production, later defined as “capitalist”, the productive forces born within the bourgeois revolutions, that will overwhelm the social and productive structure of the feudal type, typical of the Middle Ages and of a much of the European Renaissance, definitively setting aside the circular and stationary production process that had characterized the European economy up to that moment.

It is no coincidence that economic science was born in those nations of the Old Continent, such as Great Britain and France, where the rate of economic development was greater than other countries, and where the modern process of industrial organization is established, the purpose of which is not the satisfaction of human needs, but the accumulation of capital *per se* and the making of a profit.

For the sake of brevity, we could say that Political Economy was born with *the Political Arithmetic* of W. Petty (1623-1687), with the *Tableau économique* by Quesnay (1694-1774) and with *The Investigation on the nature and causes of the wealth of nations* by Adam Smith (1723-1790). This analytical system, that will enter the history of economic discipline as "classical" political economy, will have illustrious prosecutors in Ricardo (1772-1823) with the *Principles of political economy and tax*, and Karl Marx (1818-1883) with *Capital* and his numerous other works, including *The Theories of Plus-value*.

However, as early as the end of the nineteenth century the classical economy will suffer a setback. The center of his *critical* investigation concerning the capitalist mode of production, understood as a historically determined form of organization of the production process, and the creation of “surplus”, whose origin is labor and its exploitation, will be supplanted by a harmonious vision of economic relations.

This is the achievement of a large group of economists who will shift the attention from *labor*, as an enhancement factor, to *utility*, and from social classes, as an object of analysis, to the individual and methodological individualism. Among these authors we cannot fail to mention the English William Jevons (1835-1882) for the *Theory of Economic Policy*, Alfred Marshall (1842-1924) for the *Principles of Political Economy*, and Francis Edgeworth (1845-1926) for *Writings on 'Political Economy'*; and in Switzerland, Leon Walras (1834-1910) for the *Course in Political Economy*, and Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) for the *Elements of Pure Political Economy*, who founded what will be called "neoclassical" or “marginalist” theory of political economy.

Today, this is the dominant economic theory although during the twentieth century it was radically criticized by John Maynard Keynes<sup>1</sup> (1883-1946), Piero Sraffa<sup>2</sup> (1898-1983) and Joan Robinson<sup>3</sup> (1903-1983) who, although starting from different positions, judged the positive aspects and normative of neoclassical theory more comforting than realistic.



*William Petty*



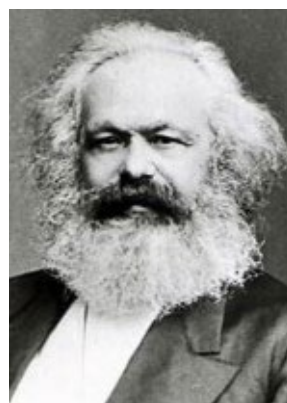
*Francois Quesnay*



*David Ricardo*



*Adam Smith*



*Karl Marx*

Therefore, in the field of economics there exist still today alternative, sometimes antagonistic, theories and analytical constructions which coexist and dispute cultural and political hegemony. Often orthogonal theories that twist the issues of economic science with those of philosophy, politics, mathematics, sociology and history. Theories in which the subject of individual or collective well-being represents the

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<sup>1</sup> J.M. Keynes (1936). *The General Theory of employment, interest and money*. UTET Italian ed., 1960, Torino.

<sup>2</sup> P. Sraffa (1960). *Produzione di mezzo a mezzo di merci*. Einaudi, Torino, 1960.

<sup>3</sup> J. Robinson (1962). *Economic Philosophy*. Trad. italiana "Idologie e scienza economica", ed. Sansoni, Firenze 1966.

compass for identifying the problematic elements of the economic system, and for overcoming any economic imbalances, crises and antagonisms.



*William Jevons*



*Alfred Marshall*



*Francis Edgeworth*



*Leon Walras*



*Vilfredo Pareto*

The purpose of this essay is to trace some of the relevant philosophical ribs in economic thought that can help explain and unravel the reciprocal relationships between the *meanings* of economic theories and understand their *relations* with philosophy, in particular with Moral philosophy. This is what interests us, and which can facilitate the study of economics, its social and political implications, and the relationships, not always immediate, of the economic discipline with the philosophical one.

The work is organized as follows. The main differences between the most relevant economic theories today are briefly outlined in the next section. Their relationship with philosophy and with moral philosophy is dealt with in the third paragraph. The last section concludes the analysis with some final evaluations.

## 2. The objects of political economy

As mentioned above, with the “neoclassical revolution” economic thought abandoned the previous approach based on labor-value in favor of a theory based on utility-value. The goal is to formulate a *universal economic science* capable of grasping the economic behavior of man in his generality, and not the specific behavior of economic agents in this or that *historically* determined society. The transition is remarkable. The two rival explanations can be called one *objective* (the classical) and the other *subjective* (the neoclassical). In classical theory, the labor-value theory traces the *exchange value* of commodities back into the sphere of *production* and to the (relative) quantity of labor employed to produce a commodity. On the other hand, the theory of utility-value denies that the exchange relationship is determined by intrinsic properties of the object, tracing the prices relative to the *use value* of the goods determined in *the market by the* meeting of supply and demand and, therefore, to the attitude of economic goods (commodities) to satisfy the needs of consumers and businesses, and their relative scarcity.

The two theories underlie a different vision of the world in which the modern economy appears, alternatively, or as a *contradictory* system in which the production of goods and its subsequent distribution (of the social product) between classes is a matter of conflict; or, as a *harmonious* process in which each individual uses utility as the foundation of value and acts “economically” to the point where utility and marginal costs are equal. In the neoclassical view, “the law of supply and demand” is nothing more than this: the overcoming of transitory market imbalances through the variation of quantities and prices towards the price-quantity configuration that satisfies the equilibrium, that is the equality between the marginal utility of needs (demand) and that of production (supply) which maximizes overall well-being.

The relationship between costs and benefits - individual and collective - is certainly a *topos* not only in economics, but also in philosophy, and in Moral philosophy. Already Adam Smith in his lectures at the University of Glasgow divided the subject of his teaching into four parts: natural theology, ethics, law, political economy. His principal works, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and (for brevity) *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), can be regarded as the systematic exposition of the second and fourth parts of this program. The two treatments are part of the same design in which the problem of the reciprocal relationship between the individual and society finds its ethical resolution which makes individual *selfishness coherent with collective altruism*. But let's see in detail.

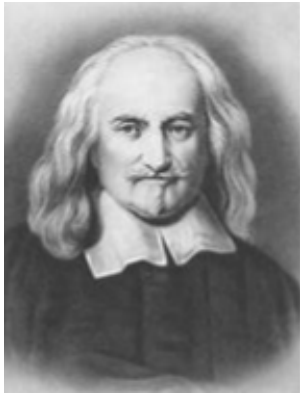
### 3. From moral philosophy to political economy

Smith's moral philosophy is linked to the *selfish system* of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1689), i.e., the affirmation of a state of nature in which all human behavior is attributable to the need for self-preservation of the individual, or *selfishness*, and in which therefore the only solution of human relations would be the state of war of each against each other. In this scenario, the establishment of the civil society would be impossible without the coercive intervention of the State. In other words, politics is not only the ordering activity of society, but it becomes the means by which men are pushed to counter the natural tendency to disintegration. Therefore, for Hobbes there is no natural tendency to civil society, to the orderly collective life that precedes the State, but it is by virtue of the constitution of the State itself that society is constituted, only to the extent that individuals renounce their individual freedom. It is in this pessimistic framework that individual centrifugal and disintegrating tendencies are recomposed in favor of state authorities, however constitutionally configured.

The reaction to this basically *pessimistic* moral philosophy takes place along an arc of time that has John Locke (1632-1704) and David Hume (1711-1776) as essential points. Locke's empirical vision maintains a residue of a metaphysical character which is substantiated in the formulation of the problem in question on the basis of an initial *state of nature*. However, Hobbes's thesis is substantially overturned. For Locke the state of nature is essentially *good* and if conflicts arise between individuals, they do not depend on the evil and selfish nature of individuals, but on the "stinginess" of physical nature, that is, on an insufficient abundance of natural goods. The limited resources are now presented as a *constraint* that prevents property, which everyone can conquer with his own work. The inevitable consequence is the conflict between individuals to grab the scarce resources made available by nature. The State then appears to Locke not as the source of civil society, but as the *warranter* of social life, that is, as the instrument that by the force of law can prevent the disintegration of civil society and the threat to private property. Therefore, for Locke the State does not represent a threat to individual freedom but is rather the instrument through which individual freedom can fully manifest itself.

Hobbes's pessimism, therefore, seems to have been overcome. However, two difficulties remain for Locke. In the first place, Locke's State, limiting its function to the preservation of civil order, cannot face or solve the problem of the excluded, of poverty and of the unequal distribution of the social product. It cannot, therefore, overcome the potential conflict it sees in the "natural" inequality of the rich and the poor. In other words, for Locke it is unthinkable to entrust the State with the task of

redistributing income if the relationship between the individual and society takes the form of a rigorously liberalism. To this first difficulty is added in Locke that of the *duplicity* between the rationalistic abstraction of the state of nature, and the empirical correlate of civil society which feeds the contradiction between the initial inspiration to overcome the *bellum omnium contra omnes* and the permanent tension caused from the irremediable distributive inequality.



*Thomas Hobbes*



*John Locke*



*David Hume*

Criticism of Locke will find its climax in Hume who will affirm the existence in the psychology of individuals of a feeling other than selfishness, which drives everyone to desire what is good and useful *for others* and for social coexistence. In Hume's opinion, virtuous acts have the characteristic of being *useful* for individuals or for civil society. It is that feeling, opposite to selfishness, that Hume designates as "benevolence", "sympathy", "sense of humanity", and it is in the first place the source from which *moral judgments* spring, which are judgments of approval for virtue. Hume's empiricism therefore represents one of the greatest expressions in modernity of the autonomy of the moral sphere with respect to the other dimensions of human life, and in particular politics. However, this gave rise to a difficulty which, present in Hume, had been made explicit by the English philosopher Hutcheson, Smith's teacher at the University of Glasgow: if all human actions can be traced back to the two independent motives of *selfishness and altruism*, it manifests a profound dualism in the psychological structure of individuals whose irresolvability is all the less surmountable, from an empirical point of view, since the two opposing motives are considered *ultimate* data that cannot be analyzed further.



## 4. Political economy and judgment

### 4.1 Classical theory

The problem facing Adam Smith in addressing the question of the relationship between Moral philosophy and Economic "philosophy" was the possibility of resolving the psychological dualism between good and evil, between selfishness and altruism and the economic one between the individual and society, which at the time represented the most relevant problems of philosophical analysis. In *the Theory of Moral Sentiments*, after confirming the foundation of morality in utility, Smith identifies a zone of human action where the selfish motive is justified based on the same principle of utility. This is the sphere of *wealth formation* because when an individual strives to reach his maximum personal advantage, he works, beyond his direct advantage, to ensure maximum availability of goods for everyone, and therefore, involuntarily, for well-being collective. It is the famous Smithian metaphor of the "invisible hand" according to which individuals generate social order and economic development despite acting with the sole intention of pursuing their own self-interest.

The central aspect of this thesis, which Smith will take up in various places in his work, is therefore that selfishness is by no means a disruptive element towards society but *can* be an element of social and economic advancement. In this perspective, Smith's *Wealth of Nations* represents the systematic attempt to explain how the free expression of individual forces, that is, free trade (economic liberalism), gives rise to the balanced development of civil society. Therefore, just as Hume represented in English philosophy the full conquest of the autonomy of morality from politics, so Smith represented in the nascent political economy the conquest of the autonomy of economic analysis and the foundation of civil society based on the conditions of free trade and production.

Smith was, however, aware that individual selfishness can lead to collective well-being only as long as pursuing one's own interest does not prevent others from pursuing theirs through prevarications that are due to positions of strength or institutional privileges. It will be in the following debate, matured in the specific field of economic discipline, now made independent from the original philosophical structure, that the analyzes on the potential conflicts identified by Smith will mature.

It will be in Ricardo that the issue of conflictuality in the distribution of the social product between capitalists and workers will appear explicitly for the first time. He will affirm, in the preface to the "*Principles*" (1817), that the identification of the laws that regulate the distribution of income is "the main problem of political economy".

Ricardo's attention to the problem of distribution did not derive only from his interest in the question of distributed shares *per se*, but from the conviction that the theory of distribution offers the key of understanding the mechanism that governs the functioning of the entire system economic. Although Ricardo's simplified macroeconomic theory is grafted onto that of Smithian inspiration, it is however based on two principles that can be distinguished as the "marginalist principle" and the "principle of surplus". The first, innovative with respect to Smith's analytical system, and a preamble to the subsequent neoclassical evolution, allows the explanation of land rent, while the second, derived from the Smithian concept of work-commanded (incorporated) in a commodity, explains the division of the residual between profits and wages, where the latter are predetermined and fixed at the subsistence level. It is worth noting that even if the Ricardian economic scheme appears free from moral judgments about selfishness and altruism, good and evil - the heart of moral philosophy - these issues flow karst in the model, where distributive inequality is the inevitable reflection of the enlargement of capital accumulation, and therefore an "economic" manifestation of the profound moral dualism inherent in the capitalist system of production.

Hereafter, it will be Marx, starting with his *Critique of Political Economy* (1859), who will bring out the *contradictory* character of capitalism. His analytic scheme is essentially a development of Ricardo's "principle of the surplus", the result of the union, in a unified theoretical *corpus*, of German Hegelian philosophy, with French utopian socialism and English classical economics. In this framework, the process of capital accumulation will be interpreted by Marx as mere *valorization in itself*, and not as the creation of means of production subordinated to the creation of final consumer goods, but rather a historically determined social relationship, detached from the need for consumption and of the collective well-being. For Marx, exchange of a capitalist nature, albeit achieved through the free market, where "mutually indifferent" individuals freely buy and sell commodities, including labor power, is a fundamentally unfair process. It is worth emphasizing the contrast between value and inequality that emerges from these Marxian places. Judgment is not moral but, in Marx's view, scientific. Marx's reversal of Hegel, i.e., the overcoming of idealism into materialism, empties Hobbes's moral judgments of meaning. Now, inequality and exploitation do not arise from the contrast between good and evil, between the individual and civil society, between moral judgments and individual values, but are the inevitable and involuntary result of the *relationships of commodities* between people and *social relationships* between commodities. When the social relationship is exchange, the related terms are not the individuals, or rather the workers, who would thus be immediately social, but they are things directly, which, as such, become

commodities to which the social nexus presents itself and opposes itself as a nexus external thing. In short, a leap forward, outside the English tradition of moral philosophy which appears to Marx only as a philosophical *over-structure* subordinated to the *material structure* of the economic conditions of production. It is an acceleration of classical economic theory which, while advocating a social change in the strong sense, renounces the values of judgment to settle for the flow of History.

#### **4.2 Neoclassical theory**

While the classical theory develops from Ricardo's "principle of surplus", the neoclassical "theory of value and distribution" derives from the other Ricardian principle, that is, from the "marginalist principle". The neoclassical model provides an analytical representation of the economic system in which, in the absence of frictions or impediments, the change in the prices of goods is the signal that pushes consumers and businesses to change their choices to the point where the *marginal utilities* of consumption and the *marginal productivity* of production is equal to their marginal costs. Following this principle, an economic agent, be it a consumer or a firm, decides to carry out a given economic action only if the initial sacrifice appears to him less than obtained satisfaction, and persists in the action until the *marginal* increase of the sacrifice does not exceed that of satisfaction. This method assumes that it is possible to divide satisfaction and sacrifice into infinitely small parts, and that as the action proceeds the marginal increase of the first decreases while that of the second increases (or does not decrease). For example, a firm improves production until the marginal cost of an additional unit of output does not exceed the marginal revenue; or an individual increases the consumed quantity of a specific good, compared to another, until the marginal utility he derives from it, weighted by the price (marginal market value) is not reduced to the level of other consumer goods. In this scheme, the agents' decision is optimal when the marginal values of the variables (costs and revenues, utility with respect to prices) are equal. Therefore, the process of choice leads to the maximization of both individual and collective utility and production. In addition, this principle of "optimality" even governs the distribution of the social product: each economic agent would receive an amount of wealth (income) equal to the amount of wealth (income) he has created, that is, commensurate with his marginal productivity.

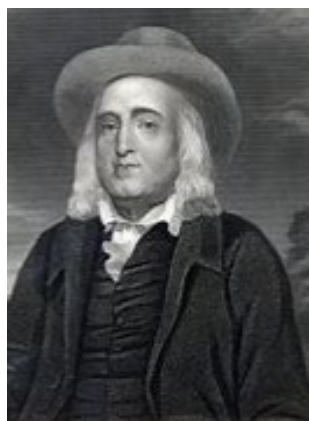
It should be emphasized that neoclassical theory is certainly influenced by the success of nineteenth-century rational mechanics, positivism, and the analytic model of the infinitesimal calculus. The axiomatic formulation of the neoclassical model, both for consumers and firms, aims precisely at this: to construct a representation of the economic system that can be traced back to mathematical functions, to objectives of

maximization of utility and profit, or of minimization of costs, in which economic choices are reduced to a mere calculation problem.

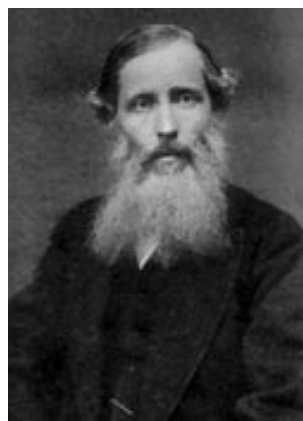
### ***Utilitarianism***

This approach also finds its inspiration in the moral philosophy of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), one of the first proponents of *utilitarianism*, who in his work of 1789 *Introduction to the principles of morality and legislation* defined the well-known principle of “the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people”. He moves in the wake of the English tradition of Moral philosophy but is influenced by the *Enlightenment* culture. If morality is to become a science, it must be based on facts and not on abstract values. For Bentham, happiness is nothing but pleasure, and pleasure and pain are quantifiable facts so that they can be taken as a criterion for action. Thus, he formulates a moral algebra, that is a quantitative and *cardinal* calculation that would allow us to know the consequences of acting by quantifying the happiness achieved and directing us towards actions that maximize pleasure and minimize pain. Therefore, if the pursuit of pleasure by the individual is well addressed it will promote the happiness of all, so selfishness and altruism they show themselves as two sides of the same coin. Evidently, we find here, differently formulated, the Smithian myth of the “invisible hand”, according to which by pursuing one's personal well-being (interest) one maximizes the collective one. This theoretical apparatus leads Bentham to conclude that utilitarianism was able to favor a more equitable distribution of resources, since it is possible to carry out a real calculation of utilities to determine the good action that leads to a higher general utility.

The utilitarianism defined by Bentham will receive two different criticisms. Philosophically, Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900) argued that Bentham's utilitarianism cannot stand as the supreme moral principle as it is impossible to demonstrate that utilitarianism must always outweigh selfishness. The latter in fact implies that it is reasonable for the individual to promote his own good without caring about that of others, and this appears legitimate and difficult to contest. Utilitarianism, on the other hand, observed Sedgwick, presents itself as a universalistic tendency, since it intends to establish that all individuals should try to promote general happiness: and it is more difficult to show the legitimacy of a moral principle that one wants to assert for everyone (the happiness general), rather than a principle (personal happiness) that applies to a single individual.



*Jeremy Bentham*



*Henry Sidgwick*

This critique will find its decisive fallout in neoclassical economic theory. Bentham's hypothesis of cardinal utility will, in fact, be harshly criticized by neoclassical economists such as Edgeworth (1845-1926) and Pareto (1848-1923) who argued that utility is a *subjective* quantity and, therefore, *not at all comparable*. The only way to classify the individual utilities would therefore be that of the *ordinal* utility where the single utilities are classified in succession, independently of their numerical value, simply in the order in which they are expressed by the single individuals, but without the possibility of constructing an order absolute and comparable. The concept of *Pareto efficiency*, one of the pivots of neoclassical theory, accepts this orderly principle and concludes that a distribution of resources (income, wealth) cannot be considered *optimal from the point of view of the market* if the improvement of the well-being (utility) of some individuals, even the poorest, implies the worsening of the utility of at least one of the others, even the richest.

However, this leads to a paradox. The neoclassical reasoning takes place on the level of technical efficiency, which has nothing to do with the moral or ethical values of distributive justice. It certainly avoids the questions posed by Moral philosophy, but does not resolve them, and instead falls into the Lockean indeterminacy of the impossibility of expressing oneself on the "rightness" of the established civil order, not being able to address the problem of the excluded, poverty and distribution unfair. A step back from classical political economy, even to moral philosophy itself, and an unrealistic absence of opinions on the issue of *values*.

## **5. Some concluding remarks**

Retracing the history of Political Economy, it is easy to see that at the basis of the various considerations of economic theory there is a common underlying idea that underlies the desire to legitimize economic discipline as a scientific theory, freed from

other disciplines, such as philosophy. However, both in the classical approach of labor-value and in the neoclassical one of utility-value, the method and the objects of analysis have their roots in a pre-existing philosophical *humus* connected to the themes of moral judgments, of good and evil, of individual and collective well-being, with the intention, however, of arriving at defining *objective* scientific criteria whose common feature is to interpret the economic “reality” and, possibly, to intervene on it to achieve a common purpose .

The issue of the scientificity and neutrality of the *method* in economics also brings with it the theme of *values* and opens the door to the question of the clear demarcation between economic science and other disciplines, including moral philosophy. From this short essay, it emerges that the *corpus* of economic theory, regardless of its articulations, is constantly crossed by the attempt to resolve the complexity of economic relations, treating them or as a historically determined contradictory fact, pertaining to the sphere of the economic structure, on which it also depends the philosophy; or avoiding moral values and judgments, with the aim of constructing an aseptic economic theory, of the Cartesian tradition, in which “truth” is the result of the analytical method, starting from a few and indubitable premises (axioms).

These are probably not fully successful attempts, which risk reducing Political Economy, freed from values, to a banal technique of numbers and analytical formalization. With an unexpected consequence: the supposed neutrality of the discipline generates a *heterogenies of ends* in which the observation of “stylized facts”, for example of an unequal distribution of wealth, is reduced to an empirical fact that cannot be modified in the name of an “optimal” allocation of resources resulting from free individual choices, or of a macroeconomic system destined to exacerbate inequalities to the point of its collapse.

How to solve this paradox? The reference to a renewed relationship between political economy (which one?) and moral philosophy (which one?) can be a way out. Among the economists of the twentieth century, it was certainly John Maynard Keynes - a stranger to the classical tradition and a critic of the neoclassical one, although perfect connoisseur of both theories - who paid greater attention to the socio-economic implications of a malfunctioning of the economic system. He did not limit himself to criticize the technical aspects of the “hegemonic” economic theory but tackled the theme of values and judgments stating that a modern capitalist system must be capable of holding together three goals that are not easily reconcilable, such as "*economic efficiency, social justice and freedom individual*", in a large corpus of

theoretical and applied reflections that evidently go beyond the horizon of political economy alone.

Issues expanded in recent decades by the economist and philosopher Amartya Kumar Sen (Nobel Prize in 1998), who starting from a critical examination of the economics of well-being has proposed a new approach to the theory of equality and freedom centered on the notions of *capabilities* and *functioning*, as measures of the freedom and quality of life of individuals. For Sen, while economic utilitarianism is configured as mere satisfaction of desires or satisfaction of individual preferences, the vision of *functioning* is based on the realization of some objective dimensions, defined as states of doing or being, which are the results acquired by the individual in terms of health, nutrition, longevity, or education. He, therefore, intends to propose, in contrast to the theory of well-being, centered on subjective utility, an overall perspective aimed at the effective protection of human rights.



*John Maynard Keynes*



*Amartya Kumar Sen*

As Sen wrote in *Development is freedom. Because there is no growth without democracy* (2000) “The income levels of the population are important, because each level coincides with a certain possibility of buying goods and services and enjoying the corresponding standard of living. However, it often happens that the level of income is not an adequate indicator of important aspects such as the freedom to live long, the ability to escape avoidable diseases, the possibility of finding a decent job or living in a peaceful and crime-free community”. By following this reasoning he will demonstrate that the simultaneous pursuit of Pareto efficiency *and* individual freedom can lead to the *paradox* in which at most one individual, among all, can have the guarantee of his own rights. There is, therefore, in Sen the impossibility of covering the gap that separates the efficiency of Pareto from the principles of

liberalism. However, social alternatives are possible that require the abandonment of one or the other assumption and, therefore, the adoption of different principles of a moral status.

In my opinion, (but I believe that this opinion can be shared by philosophers) the most fruitful lesson of this debate does not lie in the important “contacts” between economics and philosophy, but in the fact that these relationships show that the study Political Economy acquires its greater outline and content if it is closely linked to the philosophical dimension of politics, society, moral judgment, and social justice.

To reconnect our analysis with our last two famous scholars, it does not seem excessive to say that this attitude informs both the thought of Keynes and Sen, in which a *problematic vision* of the economic system prevails and a structural difficulty in ensuring collective welfare when one limits oneself to the objective of to make only efficiency and free choice proceed, abandoning the criterion of social justice.

So, it is not surprising that Sen will come to the conclusion that “A society can be Pareto optimal and still perfectly disgusting”, or that Keynes will arrive, during his lifetime, to the awareness that Political Economy can be a “very dangerous” science when approached too casually, and that “the ideas of economists and political philosophers, both the correct ones and the wrong, ... are more powerful than commonly believed. In reality - he concluded - the world is governed by few things other than those” (*The General Theory, 1936*).



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