

## Human work and economy. Re-Thinking its meaning

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1. Let us start from a general question: what is real poverty (and real richness) in human work? Our reflection here, starts from the notion of Possession as a category of being. *Habitus* is a kind of predication belonging to the category of quality, the latter operating on the simple framework of similar and dissimilar in relation to a maximum or archetypical instantiation, implying not a quantity, but a general matter as an identity or a convenience.

2. Human work is generally exposed to a “pragmatic” approach that considers it as a “task execution” and that seeks the real value of work in a dynamic tool-task relationship, often conceived as a capacity of “acceleration” of a material process in execution. This account of human work tends to consider human workers from an instrumental point of view, such as tools in a process, and is also the deep reason of social injustice and economic divide. Very often, the retribution for a work is in conditions of lack of balance between effort and human quality of the performance (frequently low profiled), from one side, and real pay-off of the working activity, from the other side (real material retribution/virtual possibility of “human” fruition of material goods).

3. A more complete definition of human work should consider a wider set of conditions and characteristic.

3.1 From a sociological point of view, I will discuss Donati (2001 and 2015) in order to define goals, material conditions, norms and senses of the working activity as series of elements generated from space, time, order and final end representation, that is dimensions of human personhood. I would then propose a tentative and relational definition of the contemporary values and meanings of the work, in a symmetrical relationship with the four dimensions/series just mentioned. From a sociological point of view, these are the defining elements of human work:

1. (Material Conditions): series according to space;
2. (Goals): series according to time;
3. (Norms) series according to idea of justice (*ordo*);
4. (Senses, meanings) Meanings: series according to the purpose, towards the final end.

Following this way, we can define, according to Donati (2001), the axes of a contemporary account of the meaning of work:

1. Exchange values (in social economic);
2. Production of primarily goods' use values;
3. Mutual service relationship;
4. Activity with extra-economical relevance

An emblematic case-study of Donati's analysis, is the parallel between the history of human work and money. If money is reduced to currency, then the work is reduced to performance, and human thought, claimed as immaterial and as overseeing to the finalistic orientation of human work, as bargaining chip. We can sketch here the key points of Donati's analysis:

- a) money is the currency held or desired by someone. Money is the currency plus a human subject (Donati 2001, p. 191)
- b) why governments reserve the exclusive right to mint the currency? You can think of societies with several moneys and different currencies
- c) work (like money) is clean or dirty, good or bad
- d) The State produces currency (employment), while civil society creates the money (work)
- e) The occupation has functional equivalent, and on the other side the work is a comprehensive report and over-functional
- f) Currency Anarchism is unacceptable, but that doesn't mean that there cannot be different forms of money.
- g) The work does not end, employment does
- h) Employment has taken the place of work
- i) Metallic currency as a sample-value, the exchange agent and an hoarding tool. Current logical separation and permanence of the transaction representation function (of currency)
- l) the real money referent disappears as the currency remains valid only in certain restricted areas, *idem* for work in general

In a parallel analysis, if we confuse work and occupation we're not able to accede to the very inner sense of this human activity in itself. Having this stated, I'm searching for a way to abandon the alternative vision of work and/vs spirit, as a specific case of the general alternative between matter and spirit. Or the vision that considers work as a strictly material occupation redeemed by a spiritual purpose (spiritualism of work). If we intend to virtualize the good produced by labour, then in parallel we materialize/ the function and the operation itself. If we do not find an intrinsic purposiveness in the single action, then we'll incur in the vain search for a general purpose of the activity as a whole: that's exactly what distinguishes knowledge in act from knowledge as dynamic activity (kinesis - *energeia*)<sup>1</sup>. Alternatively, if we start from the definition of work as relational activity, then we can consider a perspective that eliminates the dialectical oppositions of modernity.

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotele, *Metafisica*, IX, 6, 1048b 30-35: «Infatti, ogni movimento è imperfetto: così, ad esempio, il processo del dimagrire, dell'imparare, del camminare, del costruire. Questi processi sono movimenti e sono palesemente imperfetti: non è possibile, infatti, che uno cammini e abbia camminato nel medesimo tempo, né che, nel medesimo tempo, uno costruisca ed abbia costruito, che divenga e che sia divenuto, riceva movimento e l'abbia ricevuto: queste sono cose diverse. Invece, uno ha visto e vede nel medesimo tempo e anche pensa ed ha pensato» (citiamo dalla trad. di G. Reale, Milano, Rusconi, 1993, p. 413). Aristotele specifica, poi, che quest'ultima realtà sia da definirsi propriamente come *ἐνέργεια*, l'altra come *κίνησις*. L'atto completo di vedere, di aver presente qualcosa di esterno, è in qualche modo indipendente rispetto al modo di essere, alla stabilità dell'essere esterno veduto.

### 3.2

From a philosophical point of view, I propose to rethink the doctrine of corporeity, in order to resolve the dialectic alternative between work as a production of objects and as an “introjection” of the natural world, in a different way from Hegel (1992, 1975 and 1976): the idealistic doctrine fails because of thinking matter and corporeity as a sort of spirit considered under “extensive” and “divisible” conditions. But extension cannot be reduced to a pure negation.

In this section I attempt a theoretical discussion of the problem of the matter-spirit relationship as presented by Hegel, in a dispute with modern philosophical systems, at the beginning of his *Anthropology*; that is, §389 and *Anmerkung* of the *Encyclopedia*. I propose to rethink the doctrine of corporeity expressed there in light of paragraphs §99-106 of the *Encyclopedia*; these constitute the Section on *Quantity*, within the *Science of Logic*. In order to sketch the line of my inquiry, I briefly state here the terms of the difficulty.

#### 3.2.1

The first and higher confrontation with the contradiction could be found, where the material-spirit relationship is the object of thought in its highest thematic form, that is to say, the relationship between the Absolute and the world itself. The paradox seems to be defined as the complex boundary line that divides the sheer irrationality from that rationality marked by the divine or absolute thinking that is, for the human intellect, only an object of intuition in a, so to speak, fruitful defeat in representative activity, one suspended between the absurd and the mysterious. Spatiality and the extension are conceived as qualitatively different to the Creator, both in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition as well as in the Platonic-Augustinian, or in the sphere of those systems that inherit from their ancient antecedents the fundamental dualism that considers the matter and spirit as irreducible. Only Leibniz promotes an idea of matter as energy solidification paradoxically compatible with the creation by a pure Spirit, although this line of thinking poses the problem of assimilating energy in a (modern) physical sense to the spirit in a philosophical sense. We can start with a strict consideration of the *status* of the Absolute being in connection with the determination of space and time. To maintain a radical discontinuity between spirit and matter is incompatible with a notion of spirit that possesses *eminenter*, albeit not *formaliter*, all perfections of being, including the spatiality. Precisely in this sense, the classical doctrine of the transcendentals allows us to point to a convergence of being and unity, and then to distinguish the strong unity of spirit from the divisible unity proper to extension. In the final analysis, this path leads, in consequence, to thinking of matter as a sort of «numb, blurred, ultimately unconscious *psyche*». But the extension cannot be reduced to a pure negativity - incompatible logically and then metaphysically, we would add - with the pure positivity of the Absolute.

It seems possible to say that there is an essential difference between spatiality and temporality: in fact the eternal and the temporal truly possess that relationship which, in the traditional perspective, is mistakenly attributed to spirit and matter. What is temporal is indeed nothing other than what is-not-yet or no-longer-is, and hence it is defined negatively vis-à-vis that which is simpliciter. By contrast, to maintain that extension coincides with divisibility presupposes an undue inclusion of spatiality within that temporal horizon outside of which no whole whatsoever can be thought of as being divided. While temporality is in no way compatible with any predication of inherence in

primary substance, spatiality seems to be incompatible with such predication only if it is considered as present *formaliter* in the Absolute; whereas it would not appear to be so if it were seen as present *eminenter* in the Absolute, as a perfection reducible to spirit. A valid argument on this point would revolve around the attempt to show that even *eminenter* spatiality is not reducible to spirituality, which is why the extension could be originally included as a perfection among the essential determinations of the Absolute. Then, for a better determination of the idea of the presence of spirituality and spatiality in God, we note that this task is revealed as too large for the forces of human thought. Following this line of thought, although we cannot accept the monism of Spinoza, the thinker who more than any other walked the arduous path that has emerged here, the opening of the issue of «matter in God» generates interesting prospects for the development of the logos of the revelation which, within this area, seems to have recourse to its highest levels. And this is not an inappropriate theme to concern with, when we consider Hegel philosophy.

The very idea of a *metaphysical* corporeity is non-contradictory only if corporeality is a determination present *formaliter* in the Absolute being as an equal of spirituality, which could never contain it *eminenter* transvaluing spiritualising it<sup>2</sup>. The Absolute, or the original dimension of being, is *formally* ad not *only eminently* spatial, while it is *not formally nor eminently* temporal. Otherwise corporeality would be formally (and eminently) incompatible with the spirituality of the Absolute, while it would be only formally incompatible as a property of the metaphysical body, as it would be only transvalued in the spirit, this transvaluation coinciding with a simple consideration of the matter out of the temporality. But temporality, as we stated at the beginning, is a property we can correctly separate from the material extension in itself. In other words, the resurrected body is conceivable only if it is not simply the immortal soul, but if it is also an unitary and indivisible (immortal) body and not a spiritualised one, in which case it should be such only eminently and non *formaliter*, and this last is incompatible with the property of a bodily metaphysical permanence<sup>3</sup>.

In consonance with this argument, which tends to show the impossibility of understanding spatiality as a determination *eminenter* reabsorbed in the spirit, one could say that the effort of understanding spatiality as reducible to (or deducible from) the spirit is in vain in as much as it is modelled on the ideal and conceptual-representative human relationship which is projected anthropomorphically to describe the relationship between God and the idea that God has of the world, or rather the *status* of the ideas within God.

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<sup>2</sup> From the point of view of Divine Revelation, and in order to somehow think the doctrine of resurrection of bodies, it is then clear that the glorious bodies are not the only “non-worldly” or metaphysical corporeal entities as the meaning of the incarnation of the Word becomes clear as well as the meaning of likeness between God as Absolute and man.

<sup>3</sup> The classic distinction between *eminenter* and *formaliter*, in a discussion of the *status* of the transcendent principle of the world in connection with the world itself and spatiality, draws on the distinction that Descartes poses (in *Secundae Responsiones, Rationes Dei existentiam et animae a corpore distinctionem probantes more geometrico dispositae, Definitiones* III-IV), in its turn echoing scholastic terminology, between what is «*formaliter* in idearum objectis, quando talia sunt in ipsa qualia illa percipimus; et *eminenter*, quando non quidem talia sunt, sed tanta, ut talium vicem supplere possint». In both cases, according to Descartes, this involves determinations of the objective side of ideas, identical *in idea et in objectis*.

3.2.2. In its essential characterization of idealism definition, Gustavo Bontadini (1996) does not fail to consider the direction of thought to himself as a reversal of the consideration of the object; a movement that goes towards a new consideration of the object of thought within the subject. Reversing, the latter, which coincides with that reversal «of the intention or knowledge movement from his (*proper*) direction to the absolute being, to an orientation to the pure thought», decisive as it marks «the transition from phenomenalism to idealism: from the conception of reality as appearance, to the consideration of the reality as a Subject; from the critique of metaphysics to a *new* metaphysics, the metaphysics of mind». But notice that according Bontadini this passage from one to another *moment* is made legitime, and even necessary, by the fact that phenomena are contents of consciousness. Knowing is defined precisely by the absence of his own «presence» in favour of the manifestation of being that is present (given) in it; since, Bontadini says, knowing is the same being as manifest, it follows that this identity cancels all distinctions «between being and itself, and stands as the same intimacy, the same essence of the *esse*».

To affirm that this principle is not defining of idealism more than it is defining realism, or rather, classical metaphysics in its Thomistic version, entails for Bontadini also the occasion for remembering that any distinction or separation, that should appear in reality after the idealist identification in reality, would be attributed to a aporetic principle valid outside the knowlegde and as such, outside the realm of being. This external principle should be identified with and reduced to what here seems to correspond, beyond these considerations, such as the purer and more charged of paradox definition of the idea, in it's turn paradoxical, of «matter».

But such a difficulty (*aporia*) should not *detract* away from the consideration of knowledge as essence or *vinculum substantiale* of the being and also from the correlative perfection, identical, by definition, or closely related, *of one towards the other* of the two *modus*, namely being and knowledge. Even more, to recall the doctrine of intentional identity of the known and the knower, distinguished by virtue of the *form dematerialization* in its intentional-being from «pure and full» ontological identity, implies to parallel recall a certain primacy of intentional identity upon the actual and real, and by this way, if the actual distinction between form and matter is kept at level of *synolon* entitative union, under the intentional aspect the object form becomes in reality subject.

Then *idealism* that has stated itself as intimacy of thought to the phenomena, is an improper idealism, one might affirm, as the true idealism is a doctrine that unites this condition of thinking with the unproven assumption that there is an additional dimension further to the immediate or intuitive representation content or, in other words, that intentionality does not stop at this stage but turns (changes) itself in a non-representative form, to an «object» that we must assume as not given in the representation but that we should believe, with further assumption, as responsible of the influence on our sensibility that is at the end direct cause of our «feeling». And so, to sum up this discussion, only in an *apertis verbis* phenomenalist condition, like the one that involves the dual assumption that we have now designed, it can be said that the doctrine of the identity of being and thought does generate a true idealism, or rather something that could be called the essence of idealism.

If, for finite mind, the lawful *mediation* always starts from immediate to reach, indirectly, an immediate, then the vision of the act of mediation would be self-destroying for a thought that is incapable to draw the ultimate mediation term, without which the

thought would precisely remain in possession only of that single mediation act, a contradictory pure mediation. But this side reveals that idealism, as well as the previous phenomenalist position, implies the absoluteness of mediation, which is in itself a contradiction, but constitutes the only way to avoid once more the mutate again idealism into realism, since, on the contrary, to exclude epistemological transcendence of the absolute, means having «achieved a representation of the absolute and to terminate the movement of thought, and have become realists». Bontadini affirms that Idealism, as the phenomenism, involves the affirmation of transcendence, without which the idealism, having become an absolute idealism, would coincide with the absolute realism.

3.2.3. The only way to affirm a metaphysical consistence of the world is to assume the absolute as a principle of the matter itself and not only of the spirit. But this consideration involves a radical question upon the transcendence of the Absolute. Either we consider the matter as positively perfect in the Absolute independently without the spirit, or there is no possibility to think it. Then the material perfection is a perfection and it in the absolute in itself. Matter is not self-contradictory. Neither “one” nor “many”. But it is not identical to it-self (see Antonopoulos )

3.2.4 After a theoretical consideration of the relationship between Spirit and Matter from an Idealistic point of view (section 3.2.1), and after an overview of Gustavo Bontadini interpretation of the essential doctrine of Idealism (sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3), we can recall here the young Hegel reflexions upon the “Spiritual” meaning of human work.

The Elevation (*Aufhebung*) of nature is achieved through the passage from the individual spirit, which is still an ideal moment of existence of the spirit, and through mutual recognition (*anerkennen*), towards an overcoming of the distinction between the individual's own consciousness, that become aware of themselves in the positional act of their form as an objective reflection on intellectual and voluntary act, gaining an organization of “collective people” as a real substance and universal ethics. A similar view has gained in *Jenenser Systementwürfe* through the dialectic “exposition” of consciousness that produces, using the instrument as a *medium* related to work power, the fulfilment of a necessary stimulus; this awareness comes ultimately to an awareness of themselves as “ideality of removing” the impulse (*Trieb*).

The product itself of imagination and thought, must attain their stable denomination, in the moment of language, prior to the actual work of the practical activity; at the very beginning of the thought activity, to act on himself will be equivalent to “bring out” himself: “This work is therefore the first inner work on himself, an entirely non-sensitive activity and the beginning of spirit's free elevation, as it has here itself as an object. “The tool for the job, like the name and the language for the memory, is considered as a means against the simple “statement” (claim) of need; as well as the medium remains in relation to the purpose, as it allows an infinite number of instances of an identical purpose, and then an extended relation to the realm of objectivity.

4. An ambivalent definition of work as an activity of production or as an activity of introjection of the “world” (an evolution and more complex version of the procedural and pragmatic conception of work resumed here in paragraph 2) leads symmetrically to a double definition of the values of working activity itself, one side focusing on the

material conditions (often and erroneously intended only as an economical relevance) and the other insisting on the spiritual value (often and erroneously intended only as a “virtual” relevance). This clarification (as sketched in paragraph 3.2) of the matter-spirit relation is the philosophical ground for a non-spiritualistic definition of human work, that integrates Donati’s analysis of sociological and relational aspects (as sketched in paragraph 3.1).

5. A non-spiritualistic definition of human work would constitute, in my opinion, a positive evolution in the new building-*paradigma* of a Christian Humanism; if we consider the “material side” of work as a “negative”, “heavy” dimension that could only be tolerated weather it is redeemed by an intellectual-spiritualistic superstructure, we could consider as a “real humanisation” of the work, the paradoxical condition in which we have “poor” workers (for example, lacking even of time to cultivate their personhood), living in a relation “with the human good of the work” that is simply and only virtual: a superficial perception of possessing goods or a projection in an immaterial (in a incorrect sense) dimension, but not a “good life” experienced in the deepest dimension, a perception and a projection that could be judged, falsely, as “richness”.

#### 6. Relational aspects of human work

The whole body of the moral and intellectual virtues required for this “redemption”, make it almost impossible to actually pursue them in ordinary life. The only thing that we should require the worker to pursue would be the ability to effectuate a timeless contemplation of his own work. He must understand it as something in itself permanent. The production of the entities arising from work covers a sector classical metaphysics was able to think with great difficulty. That is the realm of the freely designed beings and achieved in mind, even before they become real artifacts, by a subject that causes as a free cause. The difficulty is related to the fact that the free subject causes in a necessary way, while the absolute subject actually causes as totally free. This conceptual sequence constitutes a paradox. Timeless projection of his own work. The material is a co-principle of the being and should not be redeemed “from outside” or via (through) an external thought. Simply it has to be conceived in a timeless form, as unique, incorruptible and unrepeatable.] In conclusion, my reflexion would be and attempt of answering the question I put at the beginning: What are real poverty and real richness in human work? My answer would rest on the definition of work as an activity tending to achieve the good of the complete psycho-physical and relational unity of the human person, as synthetized in point 4 of the present synthesis. Real poverty would be a situation in which our singe work will be reduced to functional occupation, without the capacity of attain a full set of relational aspects of the work activity and without the capacity of acting as a permanent creator of a permanent good. And that’s not a generalization of one own work and an insertion in a wider perspective, that could be done, but in addition to the fundamental movement, the latter being rather a concentration on the positivity on matter and its “gravity” I should say<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Amartya Sen, *La libertà individuale come impegno sociale*, Laterza, Roma Bari 1990, pp. 23- 24: «Invece di concentrarsi sui bei primari o sulle risorse che gli individui detengono, è possibile focalizzare l’attenzione sugli effettivi stili di vita che le persone possono scegliere di condurre e che concernono diversi aspetti del “funzionamento umano” (*human functionings*)». Il lavoro ha un importanza centrale nel definire la libertà che qualifica la condizione di povertà, in relazione al possesso o meno di questa capacità. La

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