

FROM THE *LECTURES ON DRAFT CHAPTER 6 OF DAS KAPITAL*
TO *THE ENIGMA OF VALUE*.
CLAUDIO NAPOLEONI'S THOUGHT
DURING HIS YEARS IN TORINO, 1971-1978

GIULIANO GUZZONE*
ROBERTO MARCHIONATTI**

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the development of Claudio Napoleoni's thought during his time at the University of Torino, and in particular the years from 1971 to 1978 in which his relationship with Torino's cultural-intellectual environment was most intense. In these crucial years, Napoleoni started a new research program, after the crisis of the interpretative paradigm developed in the 1960s. In Torino, Napoleoni embarked on a systematic re-reading of the entire Marxian corpus of the Critique of Political Economy in his university courses in the academic years 1971-1972, 1972-1973 and 1973-1974, beginning with his *Lezioni on Marx's The Process of Production of Capital*, Draft Chapter 6 of *Das Kapital: The Results of The Immediate Process of Production*, and continuing on to his fundamental monograph *Valore* (1976), his project of a new *Dizionario di Economia Politica*, and the paper *L'enigma del valore (The Enigma of Value)* (1978), which marked the beginning of the evolution of Napoleoni's thought towards a "philosophical anthropology".

Keywords: Marx, Sraffa, Alienation, Real Abstraction, Transformation Problem.
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* Fondazione Luigi Einaudi, Torino. Address for correspondence: guzzonegiuliano@gmail.com.

** Università di Torino. Address for correspondence: roberto.marchionatti@unito.it.

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Claudio Napoleoni was called to the University of Torino in 1970.¹ In the spring of 1971, he held an initial series of lectures there on Marx's *The Process of Production of Capital*, Draft Chapter 6 of *Capital: The Results of the Immediate Process of Production*, the text of which was published the following year (Napoleoni 1972a).² In the following years, he held courses in Economic Policy and History of Economic Doctrines. The relationship with the city and its university lasted until his death in July 1988. But for various reasons, this relationship had weakened, over the years, starting from the end of 1977, when he requested leave from university teaching after his election as a member of Italian Parliament in June 1976 as an independent with the Italian Communist Party ticket. Napoleoni's ties with the city of Turin, its university, and its cultural-intellectual environment were thus closest and most intense between 1971 and 1977-1978. These were crucial years from the standpoint of Napoleoni's scholarly production and the development of his thought. This paper addresses this period.

1. SPRING 1971: THE CRISIS OF THE INTERPRETATIVE PARADIGM OF THE 1960S AND THE THEORETICAL WORK AROUND MARX'S DRAFT CHAPTER 6 OF *DAS KAPITAL*

The *Lectures on Marx's Results of the Immediate Process of Production* were delivered in a period, the spring of 1971, in which Napoleoni was becoming gradually but inexorably aware of the incompatibility between the notion of "abstract labor" as "real abstraction" which from 1968 onwards³ had been at the center of an intense intellectual dialog with the philosopher Lucio Colletti, and the Marxism propounded in *La Rivista trimestrale*, to which he himself had made a decisive contribution. The problem had first emerged in November-December 1968 during a seminar held by Napoleoni and Colletti at the Scuola italiana di scienze politiche ed economiche

¹ On Claudio Napoleoni's intellectual biography, see BELLOFIORE 1989, 1991: 19-49; RODANO 2012; VACCARINO 1992a.

² "The Results of the Immediate Process of Production" also known as "The Results of the Direct Production Process" is part of a draft of *Das Kapital* which Marx wrote between the summer of 1863 and the summer of 1864. For the first Italian edition of Marx's text, see MARX 1969.

³ In 1968, the Italian translation of *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie* by Eduard Bernstein, edited by Enzo Grillo and published by Laterza, was accompanied by a long introductory essay written by Lucio Colletti, with which the philosopher inaugurated a new phase of his thinking, centering on the affirmation of the "organic unity between the theory of value and the theory of fetishism", but also of the identity between abstract labor and alienated labor. See COLLETTI 1969b: 61-147: 111-124.

(SISPE) (Italian School of Political and Economic Sciences).⁴ The text, still unpublished, of the lectures and debates⁵ shows that for Napoleoni, affirming the real character – not merely logical-mental – of abstract labor meant, first, re-establishing the specificity of Marxian analysis with respect to David Ricardo’s approach and, implicitly, to the “economic revisionism” – to adopt the expression used by Lucio Colletti in his *Il marxismo e Hegel* – whose starting point had been Sraffa’s *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities* (Sraffa 1960). Second, it meant refuting the accusation of arbitrariness the Austrian economist Eugen Böhm-Bawerk had leveled at Marx’s procedure; and third, distancing the concept of capital from a purely material representation and restoring its social-historical traits.⁶

It is thus not surprising that, at this juncture, Napoleoni endeavored to reconcile “abstract labor” as “real abstraction” with the concept of “fetishism” (or rather, capitalist alienation) that was at the core of his earlier reading of Marx. Since, however, this concept implied the residue-free inclusion of labor in capital and the reduction of the producer to an accessory or “living appendage” of the machine system (what Napoleoni called “subsumption” in the real, material sense),⁷ reconciliation was possible only on condition that real abstraction be placed in a simple mercantile production distinct from (but preparatory to) capitalist commodity production.⁸ As a consequence, however, Napoleoni found himself unable to accept Colletti’s equating of abstract labor with alienated labor. For him, abstraction and alienation were, and could not but be, different concepts, mutually irreducible points of view, but converging on the reality of modern wage labor.⁹ But the main reason Napoleoni

⁴ About SISPE (1968-1974) and the training of economists in Italy, see BELLOFIORE and BELTRAME 2004: 229-242.

⁵ The seminar was held on November 21, 22, 23, 29, 30 and December 5, 6, 7, 1968. Altogether, the text amounts to over 100 pages. In addition to Napoleoni’s lectures, there are discussions with Bruna Ingrao and Marina Bianchi, who were among the School’s students. See Fondazione Istituto Piemontese Antonio Gramsci, Fondo Claudio Napoleoni (henceforth FN), Envelope 6, Folder 15.10, Doc. 1-8.

⁶ See in particular the lecture of November 30, 1968 (FN, Envelope 6, Folder 15.10, Doc. 5, cc. 1-17).

⁷ See the lectures of November 21-22, 1968 (FN, Envelope 6, Folder 15.10, Doc. 1-2). It should be noted that the famous *Fragment on Machines* of the *Grundrisse* had already been published in Italy under the title *Frammento sulle macchine*: see MARX 1964. The *Fragment on Machines* is the section entitled “Fixes Kapital und Entwicklung der Produktivkräfte der Gesellschaft” (Capital and the Development of Society’s Productive Forces) in the *Grundrisse*’s sixth and seventh notebooks. It was written in the first half of 1858.

⁸ See the lectures of November 29 and December 5, 1968 (FN, Envelope 6, Folder 15.10, Doc. 4, cc. 1-2 and 6, cc. 1-18).

⁹ See the lecture of November 23, 1968 (FN, Envelope 6, Folder 15.10, Doc. 3, cc. 1-18: 3-6).

insisted on this conciliatory effort hinged on the famous Marxian problem of transformation: the solution based on the dualism between simple production and capitalist production of commodities, each with its own market and circulation, made it possible to disregard any mathematical conversion procedure between more or less compatible price systems, and to hold firm to the thesis (also fundamental to the Marxism of the *Rivista trimestrale*) that, in a capitalist situation, the terms of exchange are determined exclusively by the productive configuration, by the technical characteristics of capital, without any reference to abstract labor as a valorizing substance. There were, however, also negative implications: on the one hand, simple commodity production is such precisely because the commodity form is not yet generalized to labor-power, so there are good reasons to doubt that the abstraction of different labor could have, in this sphere, a real character in Marx's sense. On the other hand, at the moment when that generalization is accomplished, there is the transition to capitalist commodity production, in which – according to Napoleoni's proposed reading – the reality of abstraction cannot remain. In other words, real abstraction came to stand on the very narrow ridge between “not yet being” and “no longer being”; it stood, so to speak, in the background of capital.

In the spring of 1971, at the beginning of his Turin period, Napoleoni made the extreme attempt to untangle these conceptual nodes, i.e., to assign abstract labor a function other than price determination but equally relevant to the critical understanding of the capitalist mode of production. If, however, we look at the most remarkable (unpublished) documents of these weeks, the notes on the *Questione della scarsità*¹⁰ and on *Il problema della trasformazione dei valori in prezzi*,¹¹ some untitled notes of January 18, 1971¹² and of April 7, 1971 (the latter attached to a letter addressed to Franco Rodano),¹³ we see that Napoleoni did not manage to go much further than the premises advanced at the end of 1968, in particular with regard to abstract labor as the foundation of capitalist exchangeability but not as the determining factor of actual exchange relations. Abstract labor was considered, in other words, as the factor that enables the technical-material reality of capital to be traced back to a determined socio-historical context, in which the value of the commodity, i.e., its belonging to the

¹⁰ FN, Envelope 6, Folder 15.16, Doc. 10, cc. 1-12: 2-3.

¹¹ FN, Envelope 3, Folder 2, Doc. 7, cc. 1-8: 4-5, 7-8. This note appeared posthumously in NAPOLEONI 1992: 112-113, 115-116.

¹² FN, Envelope 6, Folder 15.16, Doc. 6, cc. 1-5: 3.

¹³ FN, Envelope 6, Folder 15.16, Doc. 9, cc. 1-4.

complex of abstract wealth that is the product of capital, is still expressed through a system of prices linked to the productive configuration of capital itself (according to the von Neumann-Sraffa theoretical stance).¹⁴ With great intellectual honesty, Napoleoni sought to embrace to the very end what he considered to be the irreversible result of Sraffa's operation: the determination of prices without reference to exchange values based on objectified labor.¹⁵ However, he was equally clear and inflexible in rejecting the belief that, starting from this result, Marx's thesis on capital as an exploitative relation could still be maintained and preserved. On the contrary, he felt, it was precisely this thesis that was in terminal crisis after Sraffa: the only function that abstract labor could perform, once its role as valorizing substance and determinant of the reasons for exchange had vanished, was that of reuniting the materiality of capital (and its price system) with a socio-historical reality not of exploitation, but of alienation,¹⁶ where "alienation" meant the commodification of human labor prior to its integral capitalist "subsumption".

We can of course ask whether Napoleoni's solution did not still imply a distinction, within Marx's theory of value, between a qualitative aspect to be safeguarded (i.e., abstract labor as foundation/presupposition, the reduction of labor-power to commodity) and a quantitative aspect to be abandoned (abstract labor as quantifiable and measurable substance). Likewise, we can ask whether this distinction did not end up being analogous – despite the far from secondary difference on the exploitation-alienation node – to that proposed by "neo-Ricardian Marxism" (and placed, by Napoleoni himself, "outside of Marxism" and "outside of truth");¹⁷ and

¹⁴ On Napoleoni's dialog with Sraffa and von Neumann, see MARCHIONATTI 1996: 11-20; RODANO 1992: 79-80; ID. 1999: 18-23.

¹⁵ FN, Envelope 3, Folder 2, Doc. 7, cc. 1-8: 2; NAPOLEONI 1992: 110: "Sraffa's scheme is the solution of the transformation problem. The distinctive feature of this solution is that contrary to what Marx thought, prices can be determined without any reference to values. [...] All ties between the world of prices and the world of values are broken".

¹⁶ "The thesis that the commodity, as the specific form of the product in a capitalist situation, is reducible to abstract labor is abandoned. This does not mean that abstract labor is not an attribute of the capitalist situation, but that the latter is characterized by something else in addition to this attribute: in other words, competition and r are just as essential as abstract labor to the definition of capitalism. In this way exploitation ceases to be an internal characteristic of the capitalist relation (which takes the form of a single alienation with two opposing figures)" (FN, Envelope 3, Folder 2, Doc. 7, cc. 1-8: 5; NAPOLEONI 1992: 113); "[...] the transformation which, according to Marx himself, the commodity undergoes when it passes from presupposition to result of capital is a transformation which affects its very reducibility, as value, to objectified labor" (FN, Envelope 3, Folder 2, Doc. 7, cc. 1-8: 7-8; NAPOLEONI 1992: 115-116).

¹⁷ See NAPOLEONI 1970a: xxviii-xix; ID. 1992: 112-113 (FN, Envelope 3, Folder 2, Doc. 7, cc. 1-8: 4-5); ID. 1971. The first intervention referred to Paul Sweezy, who had introduced the

lastly, whether the reasons for Napoleoni's shift away from his previous theoretical positions stem from this analogy.

The Torino lectures in the spring of 1971, i.e., the bulk of Napoleoni's theoretical thinking about Marx's Draft Chapter 6 of *Das Kapital*, are thus linked to the crisis of the interpretative paradigm he elaborated in the 1960s. In some respects, those lectures are part of that crisis, an aspect of the reaction to it and, at the same time, the first admission of its irresolvability and insuperability. In the last lecture, Napoleoni declared that this paradigm, while presenting a "critical position with regard to the capitalist economy and society", was not a simple revision, but a real departure from Marxism; he also acknowledged that viewing capital as an extreme form of alienation, implying the "effective disappearance, as an autonomous category, of labor [...] as a producer of use-values, but also [...] as a possible valorizing substance" (Napoleoni 1972b: 180), completely disregarded the notion of "abstract labor". And he concluded:

It seems, then, that the only position that can hope to be tenable within Marxism must start from ascertaining an open problem, and must determine whether the categories that Marx places as the basis of the analysis of capital have given rise, in Marx, to an analysis that really corresponds to their richness, and thus whether there is no room for a further development of Marxian analysis that resolves what at the present stage appear to be contradictions.¹⁸

2. FROM THE END OF 1971 TO *VALORE* (1975-1976): A NEW THEORETICAL RESEARCH PROGRAM AND ITS APORIAS

It was not until the autumn of 1971 that Napoleoni started a research program consistent with this stance on the problem. In October of that year, he participated in a conference of the Istituto Gramsci on "Italian Marxism in the 1960s" with a speech that struck a fresh note. Here, he recalled the contributions made by Lucio Colletti and Piero Sraffa to the "Marxist theory of capitalism" and, in particular, to the theory of

distinction between the quantitative and qualitative aspects of Marx's theory of value in order to preserve the Marxian theses on capitalist exploitation in the framework of a revival of Ladislaus von Bortkiewicz's approach to price determination; the second referred to Maurice Dobb, Ronald Meek and, implicitly, the Italian economist Fernando Vianello (whose positions had been discussed in an exchange of letters: see FN, b. 7, f. 22, docs. 1-4). The third referred to Siegmund Ginzberg's ideas expressed in an article in the journal *Critica Marxista* in 1971.

¹⁸ NAPOLEONI 1972b: 185. See FN, Envelope 3, Folder 2, Doc. 7, cc. 1-8: 5 (see also NAPOLEONI 1992: 113, where the reference to "Marina" has been deleted by the editor), in which such a position was attributed to Marina Bianchi, who in 1970 had published her *tesi di laurea* (BIANCHI 1972 [1970] with a preface by Napoleoni himself; NAPOLEONI 1970b).

value: on the one hand, the identity of abstract labor and value; on the other, the simultaneous determination (and self-sufficient with respect to exchange values, that is to the “objectified quantities of labor”) of prices and the profit rate. Napoleoni expressed his conviction that the problem of transformation was not “irresolvable within the essential terms of Marxism” and that, indeed, it could be overcome through “research [...] capable of developing the aforementioned terms organically” (Napoleoni 1972c: 434). This research would, in his view, have to start, first, from the rediscovered relevance of the concepts of abstract labor (as a “real abstraction”) and exchange value for the conceptualization of “capital” not only as a phenomenon of alienation, but above all as a relation of exploitation; and second, from the search for a non-mathematical relation between value and price of production, since it was now clear that the history of transformation as a mathematical procedure, from Bortkiewicz to Sraffa, had been a history of failures, necessarily culminating in the hypostasis of the moment of equilibrium (self-sufficiency of the price/profit system) and in the self-dissolution of the very problem from which that history had started.¹⁹ This research program provides the backdrop to Napoleoni’s systematic re-reading of the entire Marxian corpus of the *Critique of Political Economy* (*Das Kapital*, *Grundrisse*, *Theories of Surplus Value*) in his university courses in the academic years 1971-1972, 1972-1973 and 1973-1974.

The impression one gets from the published and unpublished writings of the two-year period 1972-1973 is that of the start of a new theoretical research program pursuing multiple directions that do not entirely coincide with each other.²⁰ Two notes of October 1972 show that Napoleoni was fascinated by Colletti’s reflections on the theory of value, the theory of alienation, and the theory of contradiction. In these notes, he tested the hypothesis that the irreconcilability between exchange value and production price is a manifestation of the intrinsic negativity of capital itself, of its vocation to subsume and suppress its own presuppositions. According to this approach, exchange-value, i.e., the presupposition of the price of production, would be included (and abolished) by it, in the same way that abstract labor, i.e., the presupposition of capital, is entirely subsumed by

¹⁹ NAPOLEONI 1972b: 188-189; Id. 1972e: 33. With regard to the rift with the Marxism of the *Rivista trimestrale* in 1971-1972, it can be maintained that NAPOLEONI (1963: 427) had already clarified the rationalizing (and non-revolutionary) character of the “reform of consumption” (*riforma del consumo*). The novelty thus lies in the connection between the reformist outcome of the *Rivista trimestrale* and its approach to the problems of the Marxian labor theory of value. See VACCARINO 1992b: 33-37.

²⁰ See GUZZONE 2020: 328-332.

it. But in this way, the only possible relation between simple circulation and the process of production, between constitution and subsumption of abstract labor, between exchange-value and price of production, came to be the dialectical-negative one: a contradictory relation of phagocytizing of the “totality” by its “part” of the presupposition by the result.²¹

Not coincidentally, Napoleoni took a different and two-pronged path in the same period, addressing on the one hand the connection between the theory of value and the theory of crisis,²² and on the other, looking for a positive mediation between exchange value and price of production.²³ In short, it was a matter of propounding a theory of capitalist accumulation in which the moments of equilibrium and disequilibrium, instability and reproduction, were all present (and adequately mediated).

However, Napoleoni struggled to break away from framing the exchange value/production price problem in terms of a “dual system” of terms of exchange, and ended up entangling himself in the dilemma between an “explanatory”, theoretically weighty, but invisible, profit rate (Marx) and an empirically ascertainable but “superficial” profit rate lacking authentic critical significance (Sraffa). Once again, the outcome was that it was impossible to fully tap into the unitary character, at once critical and scientific, of the Marxian *Critique of Political Economy*. Unsurprisingly, as early as April 1974, Napoleoni had taken note of Colletti’s thesis that Marx lacked a “coherent discourse capable of transcending and resolving the duplicity of aspects that distinguishes capitalism, the fact that it is both society and non-society, inverted reality and scientific issue” (FN, Envelope 3, Folder 4, Doc. 16, c. 1).

Napoleoni, when drafting the monograph that later became famous, *Valore* (published in 1976, but written during 1975), took up Colletti’s theses on the “two Marxes”²⁴ in order to explain the failed outcome of the problem of transformation, i.e., the “disappearance of the category of value.” (Napoleoni 1994 [1976]: 98). He took note of the wreckage of the research program he had launched in the early 1970s as a response to the

²¹ FN, Envelope 3, Folder 4, Doc. 14, cc. 1-5; Folder 6, Doc. 5, cc. 1-2. See, for a comparison with this position, COLLETTI 1969b: 303-314: 313-314.

²² See NAPOLEONI 1972d: XII-XIII; ID. 1973: 9-19: 17-18; see also D’ANTONIO, NAPOLEONI and BIANCHI 1973.

²³ See typescripts of March 26 and 27, 1973, as well as two manuscripts presumably dating to the same period (FN, Envelope 3, Folder 5, Doc. 7, cc. 1-2; Folder 6, Doc. 6, cc. 1-2; 8, cc. 1; 14, cc. 1-2).

²⁴ See COLLETTI 1974: 36-37, 40-41, 99-100, 112-113. Here Colletti clearly stated his conviction that Marx’s work presented two irreconcilable “sides”: a philosophical-ideological one and a scientific-economic one. Such a conviction can be found also in ID. 1971. On the relationship between Napoleoni and Colletti, see BELLOFIORE 2020: 255-263.

crisis of Marxism in the *Rivista trimestrale*: a research program centering precisely on identifying an alternative to transformation as an intrinsically self-dissolving mathematical procedure. And he put forward an explanation along the lines of Colletti's: there could be no mediation (mathematical or otherwise) between value and price insofar as the former category was the basis of a (philosophical) theory of alienation, fetishism and contradiction/separation, i.e., of a representation of capital as an "inverted reality" (alienated, reified, fetishistic). Price, by contrast, belonged to science, i.e., to the domain of realism and the principle of non-contradiction (*ibid.*, p. 99). On the other hand, sticking to Colletti's terms (realism of science vs. idealism of dialectics) meant accepting the divorce between critique and knowledge: one could have either an ideological discourse on capital, as a prelude to opening onto a revolutionary perspective, but devoid of epistemic value, or a scientific discourse, based on traditional economic knowledge, but irrelevant to praxis. *Tertium non datur*. Leafing through the pages of *Valore*, we can clearly see that this approach was rather narrow for Napoleoni, for whom it was not, after all, a question of dichotomously opposing utopia and science, criticism and knowledge. Rather, his aim in the mid-1970s was to articulate a critique devoid of aporias, but nevertheless endowed with theoretical depth. Above all, and this must be emphasized, he continued to reason as (and to consider himself) a "critical economist": it remains to be seen how this aim of reviving criticism could be achieved without repeating the limits of the Marxian attempt (in the form in which Colletti had enunciated and fixed them). Some indications can be found in Chapter Five of *Valore* on "Piero Sraffa's Theory of Prices": Napoleoni noted that the Sraffian scheme of price determination, although "formulated totally outside of a theory of value", was in fact incompatible with the classical-Marxian theory of value but virtually compatible with the modern one (in Robbins' sense), based on the concepts of scarcity and efficiency. Moreover, he stated that the modern theory of value was most rigorously expressed, not in the neoclassical models of economic equilibrium – which after Sraffa were considered aporetic in their treatment of capital – but in von Neumann's model of accumulation (Napoleoni 1994 [1976]: 176-177); a model, Napoleoni added in the *Conclusions*, based on a "Marxian concept of capital" (*ibid.*: 180). In what sense and to what extent are these considerations relevant to a resumption of critical discourse? They are relevant insofar as they show that, for Napoleoni, the modern theory of value still had something to say about the present: but on condition that it abandoned its pretensions to generality/genericity/naturality and unambiguously embraced the historical datum of the existence of capital as a totality capable of simultaneously occupying the two poles of production and consumption, of means and ends, of reducing labor to an instrument

and constraint of its own reproduction and thus of referring the concepts of efficiency and maximization to nothing other than itself, to its own quantitative growth (to the point of making the market/plan alternative itself immaterial) (*ibid.*: 184). This conviction was not shaken by the fact that Sraffa's schemes, while compatible with the modern theory of value, could in principle prescind from it. This circumstance only meant that the price problem could be addressed and solved outside economic theory, relying exclusively on technical-material (the "productive configuration") and sociological (the distributive conflict) aspects. But this exit from economic theory came with a loss of conceptual relevance and, at the same time, of practical-operative impact: the proof that Sraffian schemes were doubly "mute" lay in their powerlessness to cope with most pressing theoretical-political problem facing the Italian economy of the 1970s: that of the economic system's "compatibility" that is, its ability to function with any distribution and any price system. According to Napoleoni, resolving this problem called for leaving the narrow confines of the Sraffian investigation and reasoning once again in terms of the "maximization of something" i.e., in terms of efficiency (albeit of a self-referential efficiency, internal to capital itself).

Nor is this all. The Napoleoni of *Valore* opined that even Marxian theory still had something to say; and it could say it to the extent that the value-abstract labor-real abstraction plexus had been finally freed from its subjection to the wholly economic problem of price determination and returned to its original philosophical setting. Its authentic function was first and foremost the historicization of wage-labor. But this historicization was not limited to affirming that labor is alienation, negativity, loss of freedom only in a given historical situation; it contributed to shedding light on how the homogeneity of means and ends typical of capitalist accumulation (as well represented by von Neumann's model) was nothing other than the reified (alienated, precisely) manifestation of that reciprocal homogeneity of means and ends which belongs, Napoleoni wrote, to labor *per se*, to labor integrally restored to its positivity and freedom (*ibid.*: 183-184). It would thus seem that, compared to Marx's original critical project, based on an untenable "syncretism" of philosophy and economics, Napoleoni's critical intention in *Valore* took note of the need for a functional distinction between philosophy and economics. On the one hand, therefore, stands the (philosophical) discourse on labor, on its alienated, negative, unfree condition; on the other, the (scientific-economic) representation of the impersonal and totalizing dominance of the "thing" (value, abstract wealth), which does not admit the pursuit and realization of human ends as it only contemplates its own expansion. Both discourses co-operated in understanding capital as a reified reality; but this co-operation on the

basis of the functional distinction did not seem entirely compatible with Colletti's sharp dichotomy between realism/anti-realism which was the starting point for *Valore*, as this dichotomy put philosophy and science in mutual competition. In other words, Napoleoni came to the conclusion that economic discourse *a)* participated in the exercise of criticism without exhausting it; and *b)*, was not the only possible source of real knowledge. A final aspect worth emphasizing is the fact that economic science found itself in a dual position: it was both the bearer of a critical function and the object of criticism (i.e., historicization).

3. 1976: THE PROJECT OF A NEW *DIZIONARIO DI ECONOMIA POLITICA*

Even while Napoleoni was writing *Valore*, his research program grew in depth and scope. In this connection, the plan for a new *Dizionario di economia politica* (*Dictionary of Political Economy*) that Napoleoni drew up around 1976 merits attention, not least because it is little known. He had already edited a dictionary twenty years earlier, promoted by Edizioni di Comunità and published in 1956. In contrast to the previous work – which had been influenced not only by the young Napoleoni's scholarly and philosophical interests but also by the cultural preferences of the publisher, the entrepreneur Adriano Olivetti²⁵ – the new project was more closely linked to the culture and intellectual life of Torino: Napoleoni had conceived it during 1975, through dialog with the publisher Paolo Boringhieri and the writer Paolo Volponi, who in the spring of that year had been appointed (briefly) secretary of the Fondazione Agnelli. Like the first *Dictionary*,²⁶ the

²⁵ See GUZZONE 2018: 90-97.

²⁶ See NAPOLEONI 1956: XXIX: "The present situation of economic science is not such as to permit the compilation of a dictionary in the classical and traditional sense of the word, since the body of doctrines that are included in this science is very far from being sufficiently systematic. There are still many economic concepts that have received and still receive the most diverse definitions from the various economists and schools. To date, it is insufficiently clear what relationships exist, or should exist, between different parts of the science of economics, which often present a degree of mutual autonomy that seems to cast doubt on whether they even belong to the same discipline. Lastly, the very nature of economic science, and consequently that of its methods and procedures, is uncertain and highly controversial"; *ibid.*: xxx: "On the other hand, the great material growth of economic knowledge, and the very uncertainty arising from the fact that it has not yet been settled, put enormous difficulties in the path of any attempt to take stock of the scientific situation in economics, to describe and interpret the real *status quaestionis* for each problem with the greatest possible accuracy. The essential difference between this dictionary and traditional ones lies in the fact that it [...] seeks to summarize [...] the current scientific set of problems. The aim, therefore, is not so much to describe a point of arrival as to offer an overview of the existing scientific material as a starting point for future research".

second was also intended to reflect the crisis (and possible reconstruction) of economic science. The theme of the crisis of economic science after Sraffa was thus at the heart of Napoleoni's rationale for embarking on the initiative. As he wrote in a letter of March 29, 1976 presenting the new dictionary:

This initiative is taken at a time when economic science is in a state of uncertainty and incompleteness, and when its operational instruments are in crisis. This situation has its objective reflection in the crisis of the capitalist production relation, of whose world conception economic science has been the main expression.²⁷

In such a setting, Napoleoni continued, a dictionary could not be regarded in the traditional way, i.e., as a "reference source and propositional arrangement of a homogeneous body of conceptions", "for the obvious reason that such a body does not exist, since the growth of doctrines has not necessarily meant progress" (*ibid.*). Consequently, "the present state of economic science is not a point of arrival that sums up in itself all its previous evolution" (*ibid.*). A dictionary could then be seen exclusively as a critical work, "where by critique we mean the historically determined reduction and expression of the overall structure of economic categories and schools of thought" (*ibid.*). In this way, the connection (focused on earlier in *Valore*) between critique and historicization re-emerged, i.e. the need for the critical discourse to display the mutual bond between modern economic science and capitalist economic reality.

4. THE "NECESSITY OF PHILOSOPHY": TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Napoleoni was increasingly of the opinion that criticism could no longer view the economic phenomenon in the same way that economic science had hitherto considered it as a rational form of social action or as a fundamental material relationship constituting the "basis" (in the Marxian sense) of all other social relationships. Rather, criticism should treat it as a theoretical-practical language, as a form of man's organization, knowledge and self-representation that only in a certain historical period became totalizing, imposing itself at the same time as a "structure" (in

²⁷ Letter from Claudio Napoleoni to Carlo Boffito, Turin, March 29, 1976, cc. 1-2: 1. Italian original text: "Questa iniziativa è presa in un momento in cui la scienza economica si trova in uno stato di incertezza e incompiutezza, e in cui i suoi strumenti operativi sono in crisi. Questa situazione ha il suo riscontro oggettivo nella crisi del rapporto di produzione capitalistico, della cui concezione del mondo la scienza economica ha rappresentato la principale espressione".

the Marxian sense) and as a dominant ideology. Napoleoni's critique thus began to evolve in the direction of what we could call a "philosophical anthropology." This expansion of the philosophical component of the critique was matched by a relativization of economic knowledge. In the words of an important paper Napoleoni wrote shortly afterwards, "L'enigma del valore" ("The Enigma of Value"), economic science, once historicized, presented itself more and more as an "analysis of the reified" and less and less as an "analysis of the process of reification" (Napoleoni 1998; Id. 1978a: 25); the latter could only be left to a philosophical, ontological discourse on the essence of man and his affairs, which alone could account for the "reduction of all reality to the economy" (*ibid.*). It is no coincidence that the latter paper concluded with a quotation from Felice Balbo's *Ideas for a Philosophy of Human Development* on the "necessity of philosophy" (Napoleoni 1998, 1978a: 25).

An interesting parallel can be seen between the dictionary and "L'enigma del valore": on the one hand, critique was conceived as an open and problematic operation in relation to its object. Hence, the premises of a renewed economic discourse could still arise, beyond the horizon marked by Sraffa and the capitalist reality. On the other hand, this capitalist reality was seen as the realization of a potential that was innate to man's essence, as an unnecessary (and therefore potentially reversible) absolutization of the negative moment intrinsic to all labor. The beginning of a renewed economic discourse, devoid of absolutizing pretensions and "imperialistic" attitudes towards the other social sciences, could thus go hand in hand with the beginning of a historical situation marked by the delimitation of the economic-productive sphere and, at the same time, by the removal of its "reified" character; a liberation *from* labor, from alienated labor, from labor separated and becoming a subject, that was also the liberation *of* labor, that is, the restoration of its character of positive objectification, of realization and confirmation of the generic natural entity. The "ricominciare da capo" ("starting over"), of which Napoleoni spoke in an article published in *Rinascita* on the occasion of Piero Sraffa's eightieth birthday (Napoleoni 1978b), was meant as a theoretical and practical "starting over" (and as practical as it was theoretical). Here we see a fundamental theme of Napoleoni's last work: the centrality of the economic and its end, the hypertrophy of production and its delimitation with respect to the overall extension of human society.²⁸

²⁸ See LUNGHINI 1992: 9-10; MARCHIONATTI 1996: 23-24.

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