

THE THEOLOGICAL OPENNESS OF ECONOMY

Tiberiu Brăilean^{1, *}, Ionel Bostan² and Petru Condrea³

¹ 'Alexandru Ioan Cuza' University, FEAA, Economics, Bd. Carol I nr.22, 700505, Iasi, Romania

² 'Ștefan cel Mare' University, FSEAP, Accounting, Str. Universității nr. 13, 720 229, Suceava, Romania

³ 'Gh. Asachi' Technical University, Division of General Administration, Bd. Dimitrie Mangeron 53A, 700050, Iasi, Romania

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Abstract

Economy proposes serving the Good – labour, the basis of the whole economical sphere is, of course, a simple and inexorable fact – the necessity to labour in order to survive. This economic activism of the human being can get closer, even demolish, the bound walls between man and man (Tagore). That is why, economy is not necessary a form of falling down into earthiness, but it can be a way out of it.

Keywords: individualism, economical activism, quasi-ontological entities, elusive spirituality, metaphysics, theory of values

1. Introduction

The economical activity has started just after the banishing of man from Paradise. The economy was present even in the far 'ancient tables' in Antiquity, and the history of economic doctrines had started with the Decalogue given to people by Moses [1]; the parable of the talents represents the first true economic theory.

2. The economic - the foreground of human concerns

Starting with the Renaissance, with the birth of individualism, but especially with the Reformation, which ensures a religious valorisation of labour, initiative and responsibility, the improvement of economic conditions came to the foreground of human concerns. It does not represent – as considered before - a praise and service for the earthly values in the deserted world, but a balance between spirit and matter.

After the descent into matter, the human effort to recover Paradise cannot neglect the earthiness or the 'system of objects' [2], which does not belong to 'a spiritual kingdom' [3], but it can be signified. After all, everything is the Being, and the economy offers man a "way to engage in the Being (...) which carries the rest of the world towards the Being" [4].

*E-mail: tbrailean@yahoo.com, Phone: +40724374131, Fax: +40722766192

One of the Being's attributes is Goodness. The Goodness has its self-justice, and serving it is essential. The economy includes serving Goodness, and that means labour. The basis of the entire economic sphere is the simple and inexorable fact that it is necessity to labour in order to survive [5]. This economic activism of the human being can get closer, even demolish, the bound walls between man and man. Therefore, the economy is not necessarily a form of decadence into earthiness, but it can be the way out of it.

Misunderstood, economy harms us, it becomes a 'prodigal son' for whom we keep on killing the fattest calf, who comes back hungrier and hungrier, without acquiring the Human bread, to allay his hunger. This is the everlasting search for human meaning and purpose in the world, the lack of which leads to killing oneself, rather than continue ones existence on Earth, even though around it there would be unlimited resources.

3. Being - oriented

The economy needs to be based on a being who understands one's meaning and the knowledge of the true value of one's action. Because nothing can be built in a deserted soul. Beyond wealth, power and pleasure (the three 'golden calves'), beyond the simplicity of life, in order to become complete, man needs meaning, love, faith and hope, needs dreams and colours to make a more beautiful life.

Through Economy, man tries to create a link between the rude materialism of the physical reality and the elusive spirituality of the inner value level. Therefore, the Absolute is not at hand, he moves across a complete ambiguous dual environment and wants to integrate, as subtle as possible, into this mechanism of guideline and interrelations, tendencies and functions, of values and liberties, to disclose what we call *human essence*.

Moreover, these complex mechanisms, which adjust most of the relations between individuals, constitute "a whole where the visible and invisible, the matter and the spirit interact, unite" [6].

Simmel [7] argues that every interaction must be seen as an exchange, as the very base for Science and social life. To offer and to receive – from this relation, man to Being, the Economy was born.

Here we are at the metaphysical basis of Economy as science. It discloses the meaning of the Being. To offer and to receive are economic acts, exclusively human, they are ways by which the Being emerges from mystery, by the wisdom of the hidden elements, and it forces man to pay attention to the mystery inside him and around him, offering a way of referring to the Being. People are, therefore, economic beings, who 'manage' the economy of the Being. Herded by the hunger for the white millennium, they cannot back out from this destiny.

"At this end of millenium, the world suffers from diseases that the economic science hasn't known how to cure as yet. This does not prevent the economic science to appear as the solidest structure among all social sciences, efficient by the multiplicity of its applications for circumscribed areas, dominating and expansionist" [8], but affected by the continuous restorations and even by

these renewed and reaffirmed ambitions.

Each step of the human thinking has two roots: the past history of ideas and beliefs, and the historic and social configuration of the present. Doctrines are the fruits of this happy unification.

The instruments (even the bluntest) which we use to render fictionally a part of the reality, imply, on one hand, *a priori* concepts and, on the other, a minimum base theory, the one J. Habermas [9] mentions as *monde vécu* (worlds, experience).

4. The economic thinking and the difficulties of civilisation

Economic thinking argues about some difficulties that our civilisation needs to face nowadays “a civilisation which – as K.R. Popper suggested – aspires towards humanism and rationality, towards equality and freedom, a civilisation which is still (...) a child that continues to grow up, despite the fact that it has been betrayed so many times by so many intellectual leaders of humanity” [10].

To rethink the Economy, it becomes necessary to knot once more the links with its initial tradition, which is deeply philosophical and human. “With all the changes that intervened with the social context, the base principle stays the same.” [11]

Many fractures of the economic thinking, paradigm changes, have passed and they still are entirely unperceived or unappreciated. Our science cannot be totally objective, neither through its methods, which imply previous knowledge, nor by its results that require a view of the world.

Subjectivity is the main reason of its relativity. As many relativists sustain, the economists write at all times *sub specie temporis* and the knowledge of the historical context ‘illuminates’ the theories of the past.

Roland Barthes sustains that, in our century, not the fact but the relationship seems to be dominant, so that it is impossible to separate an attitude from its context, a demeanour, a behaviour, a procedural way, a logic idea, and to allow it to develop in an immutable environment, which is not disturbed by the action of the economic agents [12].

Contrary to what Rousseau thought, these economic agents are not like peas in a pod, they are not independent, and their behaviour is, mostly, reactive to the surrounding modifications.

The classical theory was, equally, macro economic (science of ensembles) and micro economic (analysis of spiritual and individual destinies). The neoclassical theory was only micro economic, and the macro economic aspect was restored by Keynes. But do we have the right to step, with our conclusions and judgements, from one level to another? The encounter between the particular and the universal was studied by Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* and solved as the universality of the particularity to substitute to a particularisation of the universality. According to him, the change from one level to another it is not only unexcluded, but belongs to the dialectics movements that define the big steps of the objective spiritual becoming. The economic laws can vary according to the

level of analyses. They are relative.

According to some economists, only the theory of the unbalance and, especially the one of Keynes' unbalance [13], permits to define the fundamentals of both micro economy and macro economy and, therefore, to connect the two levels of analysis. At a macro economic level, subtle regularities (more or less spontaneous) appear, the unbalances live, evolve, move, the adjustments intervene in the conditions that feed the structural and the systemic analyses.

On the other hand, the individual decisions, even the rational ones, can lead to global unbalances, rationality itself being relative.

Obviously, there is no fixed canon, outside history, which can define reality (Kuhn, Feyerabend, Foucault [14]), but because of that we cannot accept the idea of absolute relativity and all dissolves. The very concept of relativity is relative. Auguste Comte wanted to substitute the absolute relativity, but the remark was that a relative which universalizes it is not a relative anymore – it is absolute. The relativity of the relativity is the absolute, which can only be, fortunately, the privilege of divinity...

In the same way, if it is lawful not to apply the same logics to all levels of analyses, we cannot think of it as a pure formal rationality, which would not have a different law than the one of coherent thinking. Rationality – as Descartes conceived it – is also a projection of the divine reason [15].

Between abstract logic, without correspondent of natural and cultural phenomena, and an informal logic, based on experience connecting spirit and objects, the second must be chosen deliberately. Things would not exist for us if they were not conceived by us. But we would not exist without them, because they are reference elements which guide us in the world. If we did not admit the correspondence between our thoughts and things, the world would be inscrutable, and to deny the world and to suppress any relations with it would lead to delirium. Our intellectual relativism regarding the logic is nothing else but recognising the relativity of the world.

Economy is not a branch of Metaphysics. It is just a discipline, which as many others, is founded on the global idea that we have regarding knowledge and the world. At the root of its present difficulties, it is the fact that there is a need for a theory of values, if it wants to surpass its own formalism. But this theory is forbidden in Economy. There cannot exist an economic theory of values because value is not, in itself, an economic phenomenon.

The present state of knowledge does not allow us to bet on the continuity of the real, and this world, as immediate gift or not of the conscience, became uncertain. It does only exist only as part of the principled and methodological conventions that started it. The traditional scientific conception itself, the Cartesian thinking, it is restored as founded on common ignorance (admitted) and not on primary truths, indubitable, guaranteed by an instance – source of absolute knowledge.

5. The need to turn to Logos – to the economy of happiness

Besides the inability to recognise 'the astral time' of Economy, there is a need for strategic thinking - especially for the governments – “fictions in which everyone can think that they can live on other people expense” [16]. The strategic thinking cannot develop with the limited space of the deductible logic, ensemblist, which the western epistemology transformed into an absolute knowledge tool. The social engineering and the political artefact are not the most desirable tool in the economic politics. Economical management must integrate new tools: spirit, context, time.

There is a necessity to turn to Logos, at least for fear not to miss the existence and to get into the grave of ignorance, there is a need to force down stepping in the eternal eighth day. The present economic science needs a meta-dogma to ascent on high peaks of moral celebration. Regarding the context, there is a need to limit the present heterotopy, and the analysis or judgement of the events, signs and marvels that are in a permanent balance between the immemorial beginnings (*in illo tempore*) and the apparent successive, more or less apocalyptic, endings.

Referring to the integration of time, it is desired, firstly, to understand it better. This way, Einstein considered that the distinction between past, present and future is only an illusion, even if a tenacious one. "Time is not at all what it seems. It does not flow towards one direction, past and future are simulated" [17]. Heidegger, too, talked about the unity of the present, past and future, about the individuality and their co-originality (*Gleich-ursprunglichkeit*) [18].

This conscience of living in a continuous present, practically in eternity, this time of consciousness conceived as intensive actualisation [19] produces incredible positive effects. Therefore, history can become a good teacher. On the other hand, this believe can last, freed by the anguishes of the ephemeral, not living inside us, as Bergson sustained [20], but finding out the archetype. The everlasting present of the stoics proves to be stimulated and profound, including the economic plan.

Therefore, the spirit of time, can contribute to the economy of pure happiness. "The balm which heals the wounds of time is called religion; the science which makes us cohabitare with our wounds is called philosophy" [21]. Without the two, the economy loses its meaning.

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