



## **Partecipazione e Conflitto**

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## **BOOK REVIEWS**

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Vitantonio Gioia, Sergio Noto, Alfonso Sánchez Hormigo (eds), *Pensiero critico ed economia politica nel XIX secolo: da Saint-Simon a Proudhon*, (Critical Thinking and Political Economy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: From Saint-Simon to Proudhon) Bologna, il Mulino, 2015.

The volume edited by Gioia, Noto and Sanchez represents the last, yet not final, result of a series of interdisciplinary studies that view the relationship between political economy and social critique as an interesting generative matrix of our present social configuration. The book is divided into two parts. The first part is an overview of 19<sup>th</sup>-century French utopian socialism, and the second part is an in-depth study of the multiple implications of Proudhon's thought. The choice to study French utopian socialism in the light of its relationship with political economy emerges as a historical contextualisation from the summarising picture drawn by Gian Mario Bravo. It becomes a theoretical reconstruction in Vitantonio Gioia's contribution, and finally unfolds in a number of directions in the various contributions dealing with the link between public happiness and the market, the impact of the division of labour on social life, and the risks of the socialisation of the means of production for individual freedom. The essays contained in the volume highlight how classical political economy, in the early stage of its success, expressed both a radical critique of inequalities, and a particular sensibility for the modern individual's desire for freedom. This approach defines a field of research that displays an interest, if not sensibility, which is akin to the theorisations sustained by the utopists, particularly regarding a social horizon where individual autonomy and collective welfare come together and nourish each other. However, the authors underline that the phenomenon of pauperism – that is, the tragic social consequences following the first industrial revolution – marks a divide and digs a groove between economists

and socialists, since the former justified its manifestations as a transitory consequence of a progressive productive system, and the latter interpreted its appalling seriousness as a questioning of the capitalistic model itself.

The volume shows an articulated problematisation of such affinities and distinctions, from which the 19<sup>th</sup> century emerges as a decisive moment in the formation of the relationship between individual and society that characterises our times. In particular, the underlying idea that political economy and utopian socialism shared a common awareness of individual autonomy is not insignificant for those who come out of a brutal 20<sup>th</sup>-century representation of a deadly conflict between freedom and equality, between liberalism and communism. The end of the political sovereignty typical of the *Ancien Régime*, therefore, erodes the constraints imposed by the traditional authority and paves the way towards the manifestations of subjectivity. Political economy and utopian socialism nourish this course and follow through it, thus outlining a suggestive picture of historically determined individualities that are, nonetheless, capable of promoting the progress of the whole of which they are part, through a search for their fulfilment. The economists, with an iconoclastic attitude, make a break with traditional moral philosophy, renouncing the idea of a political construction of virtue. They show confidence in their belief that individual feelings and dispositions, although questionable, may be mutually balanced and bring to an accomplished sociality. The utopists, on the other hand, share an Enlightenment sensibility towards the autonomy of the subject, against the injustice and the obligations imposed by the political sovereignty, and they endeavour to reflect on the social and technical implications of the industrial revolution, so that the prospects of economic growth may not prove unequal in their effects.

The failure of this perspective paves the way to a reassessment of the political and theoretical scenario, strongly influenced by the increasing inequalities brought about by capitalistic accumulation. Political economy rejects the sociological sensibility that characterises, for example, Adam Smith's work, and moves back to the stereotypical image of *homo oeconomicus*, far from that realistic approach that had contributed to distinguish it from metaphysical and theological speculation. Regardless of the different anthropologies of its various exponents, this discipline would assign salvific virtues to the market ignoring the condition of human lives, hypostasising its dynamics, certain that economic progress is always capable, in the course of time, of redistributing the wealth produced regardless of the substantial evidence that would prove the opposite. Utopian socialism, on the contrary, takes it upon itself to express the anxious consciousness of modernity, trying to remove the thought from the ancient enthrallment of transcendence and endeavouring to constantly combine the attention to the con-

creteness of everyday social relations with the visionary prefiguration of a society where political and economic oppression may diminish and finally disappear.

Proudhon as an author is able to synthesise the historical legacy of utopian socialism. In his writings we may find an effort to grasp the inconsistency of an individual committed to self affirmation as well as to cooperation with the other, an attempt to see sociality as the place of choice for an ever-changing reconciliation of these tendencies, and finally, the ensuing discussion of the possible solution of the antinomy between freedom and equality, and therefore, of individual and society. Interestingly, after so long, an author surprisingly attuned to the present-day debate on the relationship between subjectivity and economy has stimulated a lengthy discussion that underlines Proudhon's sensibility for the desire of freedom expressed by property and the market, as well his condemnation of social criticalities caused by an egotistic individualism unable to give voice to the multifaceted human subjectivity. The issue of a new balance between freedom and equality, very relevant nowadays, is defined in these terms. This point of view is used to develop an approach to social analysis, which may be neither transcendent nor prescriptive, capable of proceeding from labour as a prevalent matrix of sociality in order to issue a condemnation of liberal formalism, and capable of reflecting on the possibilities to actualise subjectivity in a cooperative context. Focusing on Proudhon's philosophy allows the authors contributing to this volume, as well as the readers who wish to study in depth its content, to show the value of an economic research that may be, at the same time, historical and cultural, the present relevance of a social critique that reflects on the possibility of equality starting from freedom, so that an individual's equal diversity may represent an important point of reference for social sciences. The volume, therefore, analyses the opportunities for a world where individual and society are not enemies, by recalling to our minds a past in which modern antinomies had not yet taken the tragic tones of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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