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The Conditions of Critical Knowledge on Capitalism or: The Conflict between the Economy and Philosophy

Abstract

Beginning with a presentation of the asymmetry between philosophical and economic reflection, the article assesses the possible effects of practical philosophy in relation to the critical analysis of the independent economic domain. The article emphasizes the importance of political genealogy of capitalism which explains conceptual mutations leading to a) autonomisation of economic reflection, b) self-hegemonic economic reflection, c) domination of “real abstraction” that reflects not mental operations but social practice in capitalism. It is necessary to conceive differences between economics, the economy and economic domain, as well as to establish mediation between these domains. It is important not to perceive theoretical production as passive reflection in relation to reality, but to consider the theory as a constitutive-practical factor; as the condensation of certain social relationships. For economics (“dismal science”), this means that it is co-constitutive in relation to “economic reality”. Practical philosophy can contribute to the self-awareness of economic reflection in three domains: a) the relevance of ideology in relation to the autonomy of the economic sphere, b) the importance of the measure for the economising, c) the form–substance problem. Based on the effects in the mentioned domains, practical philosophy could evoke the fact that the core of the economy is something that transcends the phenomenon of economy. The foundation of the economy is based on non-economic categories.

Keywords

commodity, capitalism, autonomisation, economic reflection, measure, form, Karl Marx

Introduction: Difficulties of confronting philosophy and economic reflection

The comparison of philosophical and economic reflection encounters certain difficulties. There are asynchronous tendencies between these forms of reflection, and their status in the self-understanding of modernity shows divergences. It will be enough to use the epochal situation in economic reflection to highlight these claims. More precisely, the genealogy of an autonomous economic reflection in modernity opens paths towards the scientific status of the same reflection. This path towards science seems like a triumphal walk that culminates in the ambition of economic reflection to become a pattern for science in general. Thus, the representatives of “economics” will refer to the fact that the same discipline is an “imperial” science that has “epistemic authority” based on which it can convey categories to other disciplines. Although the imperialism of “economics” can be corrected with the principle of fallibilism,¹ the

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Cf. Uskali Mäki, “Economics Imperialism: Concept and Constraints”, *Philosophy of the*

Social Sciences 39 (2009) 3, pp. 351–380, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0048393108319023>.

economic reflection, in its *self-assertion*, acts as a *guide to the truth of the modern world* and to see its relation to other disciplines as asymmetrical.

However, in relation to our initial thoughts, an objection can be made: is the emphasis on the difficulty of comparing philosophy and economics too heavy? Namely, there are important books that opt for the title *philosophy of economics*. We should ask: is it not enough to *descriptively* call for the fact that there are different theoretical achievements that are directed towards shaping the “philosophy of economics”?² Is it not true that various reflections on “economics” use philosophical categories, such as thematising the “ontology of economics”?³ Moreover, the situation is changing with regard to the stabilisation of philosophy of economics in the context of contemporary economics: earlier, philosophy of economics used to exist (almost) only in Anglo-Saxon countries, but today, we can observe various manifestations of the same discipline in continental philosophy, too.⁴ In addition, some handbooks problematize issues such as causal determinations, the heterogeneity of motivations, etc. from the perspective of philosophification of certain economic categories.⁵

If we take the path of description, the task becomes much easier for us. We can evoke a large number of personal overlapping in different situations related to important agents of the economic scene. For example, David Hume is accepted as a philosopher of empiricism, but at the same time, his quantitative theory of money and monetary economics is the basis for all similar orientations in economic theory. His monetary theory is praised by economists, which means that the exegesis of his work can be done both from philosophical and economic aspects.⁶ Condillac was famous not only for the empirical sensationalism but for his analysis of value and prices in the economy as well. We could discuss the relevance of Leibniz’s calculus or his notions of minima and maxima for the constitution of capitalism; it is a debatable issue, but it is sufficient that such a philosopher could be a *spiritus movens* for the logic of capitalism.⁷ If we turn to the eminent economists, we could emphasise different examples for the intentional synthesis between philosophical ambitions and economic argumentation. John M. Keynes, an unavoidable referential point for the economists after World War II (nowadays he is the source for the heterodox economics), devoted his reflections to a genuine philosophical problem, namely to the issue of probability.⁸ He could not be interpreted without his reading of the *Principia Ethica* of George Moore, and his figure, supposed to articulate the motivational movement of the entrepreneur, namely, the *arational animal spirit*, looks like a philosophical category gained from the terrain of vitalism. Friedrich Hayek, who is frequently referred to as the forefather of today’s neoliberalism, forms important parts of his endeavour as the study *in* and *for* philosophy. Hayek and his Austrian colleagues such as Ludwig von Mises were deeply involved in the *Methodenstreit*, the quarrel on methodology with robust philosophical aspects, as they considered the meaning of the relationship between apriorism and history.⁹ Finally, we could not forget such a thinker as Adam Smith with an influence on philosophy and economics. It is unreasonable to classify his theoretical achievements as economic or philosophical; he transcends such a disciplinary taxonomy.

This is enough to gain account on the personal interferences between philosophical and economic reflections. But is this descriptive phenomenology of the collaboration between philosophy and economics not only a truism? The “epistemic authority” attributed to economic reflection, as well as the

evolution of autonomous economic science, cannot be explained based on personal motives of individual theoreticians. Treatment of the relationship between philosophy and distinguished economic reflection is possible only in *capitalism*: in the pre-capitalist periods, the same relation cannot be made intelligible. This claim is supported by the analysis that reflects simultaneously on the emergence of autonomisation of the economy and the modalities of application of economics in the infrastructure of power in capitalism.

Historical dynamics of economic reflection were different compared to philosophical reflection. Before capitalism, “self-referentiality” of economics could not be promoted; the existence of different economic discussions (regarding just price, for example) does not mean that economic reflection was perceived as an independent field. It has always been linked to the transcendental criteria of the given (religious or cosmic) order, and together with these criteria, it can be understood that economic reflections were only a part of the practical direction of human life.

Philosophy, by the opinion of a philosopher, is its own time comprehended in thoughts, and it is always late, that is, the belatedness is its temporal modus of existence. Of course, this should not be understood in the sense that philosophy only reflects a given historical time, that it only serves intellectual and other interests of the given time, losing the power of making a diagnosis and realisation of transcendence concerning the epoch. In fact, philosophy that does not only passively testify about its own time, but intends to accept it *critically* would have to endeavour to understand the state of economic reflection as the *signum* of the epoch. In this way, philosophy *could be the initiator of critical self-awareness of economics*. It is rightly said that economics obscures its historical structure as well as the social relations in which it has penetrated. But only practical philosophy that shows that the processes of economisation represent the *metasubjective* moments of a given epoch can help us. Thus, a philosophy that assumes the role of a catalyst for critical thinking can *problematize* the self-ideologization of economic reflection. It cannot act as a protector of *metaknowledge* in relation to economic analysis; after all, it is in the process of self-reflection as well regarding the status and

2 Cf. Julian Reiss, *Philosophy of Economics: A Contemporary Introduction*, Routledge, London 2013.

3 Cf. Scott Meikle, “Quality and quantity in economics: the metaphysical construction of the economic realm”, in: Uskali Mäki (ed.), *The Economic World View: Studies in the Ontology of Economics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, pp. 32–57, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511752049.004>.

4 Arnaud Berthoud, *Essais de philosophie économique: Platon, Aristote, Hobbes, A. Smith, Marx*, Presses universitaires du Septentrion, Villeneuve-d’Ascq 2002.

5 Cf. Alain Marciano, John B. Davis, Jochen Runde (eds.), *The Elgar Companion to Economics and Philosophy*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham 2006.

6 Cf. Margaret Schabas, “Hume’s Monetary Thought Experiments”, *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 39 (2008) 1, pp. 161–169.

7 Cf. Peter Koslowski, “Maximierung von Existenz. Leibniz’ Theorie der besten aller möglichen Welten und die Wirtschaftstheorie”, *Studia Leibnitiana* 19 (1987) 1, pp. 54–67.

8 Cf. Jochen Runde, Sohei Mizuhara (eds.), *The Philosophy of Keynes’s Economics: Probability, Uncertainty and Convention*, Routledge, London 2003.

9 Cf. Terence Wilmot Hutchison, “Austrians on Philosophy and Method”, in: *The Politics and Philosophy of Economics: Marxians, Keynesians, and Austrians*, Basil Blackwell, London 1981, pp. 203–233.

capacity of its knowledge. Philosophy *assesses itself* in meeting with economics and develops its self-criticism.¹⁰

Commodity-bias of our conceptual thinking?

Philosophy that seeks to engage in the state of economic reflection critically evokes the categorical apparatus of the tradition of practical philosophy that was rehabilitated during the sixties of the 20th century.¹¹ Based on the same tradition, an arch can be reconstructed that connects the former *oikonomia* with modern economics: in the first case, the economy always links with non-economic normative rules. There is a paradigmatic view that sees the imprint of cosmic order in the *oikos*, and not a field where the forces of liberated economic laws are manifested. It is typical to observe “nature” as a substrate of economising even in the 19th century, namely, it is a nature which is “making nothing in vain” and which Goethe equates with “perfect economy”.¹² It is no coincidence that the founders of modern economics such as Hume or Smith perceived natural history as an integral part of their thinking.

Practical philosophy refers to the orientational power of philosophy with respect to the conduct of life. It promotes philosophy as a “performative form of life”¹³ that goes beyond the mere hagiographic exegeses in relation to the personalities of the history of philosophy. It shines the intention to evaluate communal life by measures of the highest principles that has the power of directing. The historical loss of the position of practical philosophy and the retreat of economic reflections from the mentioned field immediately directs us to the *genealogical problem* of the relationship between philosophy and economy. Namely, we are immediately forced to clearly define our path given the stated opinion that the mentioned relationship can be made intelligible *only in the order of capitalism*.

Thus, when the relation between philosophy and economy is discussed, we must inevitably face the argumentation of Alfred-Sohn Rethel.¹⁴ In accordance with his Kantian style of reasoning, there is a shared root of cognition and everyday commodity exchanges, or there is a *common ground between our mental apparatus and the circulation of commodities*. Based on the category of “real abstraction”, Sohn-Rethel places the transcendental aspects of the human being into the material conditions, and connects the conceptual achievements of philosophy to the movement of the “coinage of money”. The processes of abstraction do not take place in terms of mental events, but they represent “real processes”.

We see here not a simple coextension between philosophy and the economy, but *money* as the supreme economic category appears as the exclusive source of the emerging philosophical conceptualisation. Here, the philosophical orientation would not be derived from the intentions of a man who reflects on himself, but it would be a *by-product* of money-mediated economic communications loaded with the dynamic of abstraction. The intellectuality of the categories of philosophy is associated with abstraction emerging in *exchange*: Sohn-Rethel makes a clear parallel between the diffusion of money and the dissemination of philosophical thinking, pointing out the link between the epistemic concern of the human intellect and such an economic category as money. In other words, philosophical reflections, as representative conceptual mode of thought, are involved in the self-referential movement of money that determines the frameworks of exchange operations. Sohn-Rethel introduces the category of commodity into the centre of the debate, which is a commod-

ity-based *re-reading* of the origin of philosophy: the conceptual thinking that emerged from the movement of goods is not the *Other* of economy but its immanent feature. Moreover, this point is undeniably important for the orientation that seeks the foundation for the non-external relationship between the economy and philosophy: Sohn-Rethel contributes to the understanding of the *genuine philosophical problem of abstraction*, the abstraction process that is stored in the structural dynamic of capitalism. According to him, we can conclude that it is not enough to say that capitalism is a philosophical problem as well, or that it can be thematised from a philosophical perspective. Based on real abstractions, it *is itself philosophically determined*, its *autos* has a strong philosophical character.

We could recall that Karl Marx, who determined the thinking about commodities, has mentioned the logic as the “money of spirit”. Nevertheless, does this mean that Marx would accept without any reservation Sohn-Rethel’s formula? Even though Marx would highly praise Sohn-Rethel’s achievements, especially for his effort to provide the *materialistic basis* for the process of “real abstraction”, I speculate that Marx would express his objections. Is it justifiable to create a causal relationship between the commodity dynamic and conceptual thinking that is based on the presupposition that money, or in Sohns-Rethel’s words, the “coin of apriori”, precedes philosophy? Are we forced to make such a relationship between the development of “coins” and philosophy or should we speculate on the *non-synchrony* between the evolution of conceptual thinking and the development of commodity exchanges?

Different commodity aspects had existed even before capitalism, but never in the form of totality, the dynamics of commodities did not influence the whole of human behaviour but it was always about certain, controlled, particular segments. The self-referentiality of commodity defines only the basic matrix of capitalism: the figure of “production of commodity by commodity” (P. Sraffa) confirms this insight.¹⁵ It is only under the assumptions of capitalism that the existence of the totality of commodity can be projected, only capital can “create its own presupposition”, that is, commodity as a whole, to use this Hegelian indication.¹⁶ A shift from commodity to capital is constitutive in that capital enables the *totalization of commodities*.

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Herbert Schnädelbach, *Was Philosophen wissen, und was man von ihnen lernen kann*, C. H. Beck, München 2012, p. 13.

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Cf. Manfred Riedel (ed.), *Rehabilitierung der praktischen Philosophie*, I–II, Verlag Rombach, Freiburg 1972.

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Cf. Margaret Schabas, “Nature does nothing in vain”, *Daedalus* 137 (2008) 2, pp. 71–79.

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Cf. Richard Shusterman, “Philosophie als performative Lebensform – als textuelle Praxis und mehr als textuelle Praxis”, *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 65 (2017) 2, pp. 183–205.

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Cf. Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Warenform und Denkform: Aufsätze*, Europäische Verlagsan-

stalt, Frankfurt a. M., Wien 1971; Anselm Jappe, “Sohn-Rethel and the Origin of ‘Real Abstraction’: A Critique of Production or a Critique of Circulation?”, *Historical Materialism* 21 (2013) 1, pp. 3–14, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/1569206x-12341283>.

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Heinz Kurz, “The agents of production are the commodities themselves: On the classical theory of production, distribution, and value”, *Structural Change and Economic Dynamics* 17 (2006) 1, pp. 1–26, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.strueco.2005.04.001>.

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Jacques Bidet, “Les philosophes n’ont fait jusqu’à présent qu’interpréter diversement *Le Capital*: Pourquoi il faut le aussi le transformer. Et comment”, in: Franck Fischbach (ed.), *Relire Le Capital*, PUF, Paris 2009, p. 35.

Therefore, there is asynchrony between the dynamics of commodity and philosophical thinking. Although Sohn-Rethel introduced important questions for discussion, his procedure lacks history. Self-movement of abstraction in which money and conceptual thinking are intricate is promising orientation, but burdened with deficits, too. Finally, Marx would object the unilaterality of Sohn-Rethel's viewpoint that takes only the circulation of commodity into account and ignores production. Why should we ignore the significance of production, the relevance of relations between production agencies for the emergence of real abstractions? The ignorance of co-constitutivity between production and exchange is destined to fail.

Practical philosophy and political genealogy of capitalism

In spite of our criticism of Sohn-Rethel, we acknowledge his step forward to a) genealogical-historical logic, b) meta-contextual horizons of the dynamics of conceptual reflections in the domain of the economy.

Practical philosophy in critical perspective¹⁷ proves to be *corrective* for the ideological pretension of economics that obliterates its genetic determinedness. Consequently, philosophy should provide the categories to think through this practical-genealogical orientation. This orientation is not historicism: in this sense Marx talks about the *genesis* of the money form that is to be distinguished from the factological history of money and the successive emerging of the money form: such historicist investigation is beyond his interest. Marx or Hegel, in fact, confront with the *different conceptual fields* related for example, to Aristotle. Hegel was not only the creative reader of A. Smith¹⁸ but also a philosopher who in *Elements of philosophy of right*, following the immanent dialectics of needs in civil society, reached the modern issue of imperialism as the *internal* tendency of capitalism.¹⁹

The root of the problem lies in the *emergence of capitalism*, and the connection between economic reflection and the development of capitalism. The genesis of capitalism cannot be explained by progress patterns but by *political* reasons with contingent conjectures.²⁰ The genealogy of capitalism is not a neutral process, but an unplanned result of the dynamics of political interpretations on the collective organisation of life. And *the political-genealogy of capitalism* casts light on the emergence of an independent economic reflection. By insisting on the fact that the dynamics of conceptual taking over the world cannot be realised based on the personal motivation of theoreticians, we implicitly placed development and economic reflections into complex dynamic relations, in the configuration in which there is an intertwinedness of economic imperatives, technology, and military influences. "Interplay between socio-economic and scientific development"²¹ has been determined in the context of modern science based on the mentioned moments.²² It is not possible to separate the development of economic reflection from the path of modern science and its instrumental-invasive characteristics. Therefore, we should not forget that the economic reflection acted *mimetically* while going through the process of becoming self-referential: it extensively used the categories of modern mechanical philosophy, physics. The typical ambition of economics was to become "social physics",²³ a mode of reflection that relies on epistemological effects of those sciences that are based on naturalism. Its epistemological triumph was based on the acquired authority of modern science and benefited from the scientification of the world. It is important to emphasise that the *structural logic* of the political genealogy of capitalism

can only be used to explain the relevant ideological changes; so, this is our attitude to the classic part of Louis Dumont who advocated the genesis of economic categories based on the affirmation of the *ideology of individualism*.²⁴

A real blunder of economics is the immanent *political part in it*. *Economic reflection* is always characterized by a certain political discourse. The concept of *political economy*, which accepted as a standard term, defines the constitutiveness of political moment in economic reflection itself. The fact that Marx considers the classical economy to be “sincere” and appreciates it more than later “decadent” vulgar economics can be thus explained. It is of importance that such a theoretician as A. Smith addresses the *statesman/legislator* who will realize the new “rationality”;²⁵ the statesman paradigmatically appears within the framework where Smith emphasizes the necessity to increase “state wealth”. Uneconomic goals outline imminent economic categories. Smith attacks “prosperity” and “luxury” based on the claim that it is a “feminine” category, and he even complains that commercial relaxation weakens the “military discipline”: he explicitly declares that the country’s national defence is more important than prosperity.²⁶ Economising is clearly placed and located in *non-economic* context. It could not be understood if we did not have in mind Smith’s desire to transform existing people: the founding father of economic reflection justifies the laws and government which protects against the “anger of poor” and “reckless group”. Without expressing fear for “dissatisfied”, inferiors, we cannot reach the culmination of Smith’s indications; it is a fear of propertied class that is still present despite the possible state impacts on the stabilised property. The market as a medium of invisible hand is celebrated, but in a political context. A statesman is addressed

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Cf. Lino Veljak, “Praktična i praktička filozofija”, *Filozofska istraživanja* 32 (2013) 4, pp. 603–610.

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Cf. Birgit P. Priddat, *Hegel als Ökonom*, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin 1990.

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Cf. Lucia Pradella, “Hegel, Imperialism, and Universal History”, *Science & Society* 78 (2014) 4, pp. 426–453.

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Cf. Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1977.

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Cf. Robert K. Merton, “Science and the Economy of Seventeenth Century England”, *Science & Society* 3 (1939) 1, pp. 3–27.

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Cf. Gideon Freudenthal, Peter Mclaughlin (eds.), *The Social and Economics Roots of the Scientific Revolution: Texts by Boris Hessen and Henryk Grossmann*, Springer Netherlands, Dordrecht 2009.

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Cf. Philip Mirowski, *More Heat Than Light: Economics as Social Physics: Physics as*

Nature’s Economics, Cambridge, University Press, Cambridge 1991; Till Düppe, *The Phenomenology of Economics Life-World, Formalism, and the Invisible Hand* (dissertation), University Rotterdam, Rotterdam 2009.

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Louis Dumont, *Homo aequalis, Genèse et épanouissement de l’idéologie économique*, Gallimard, Paris 1977, p. 35.

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Here I accept our earlier arguments: Kosta Josifidis, Alpar Lošonc, “Antiliberalne posledice neoliberalizma” [“Antiliberal consequences of neoliberalism”], in: Veselin Vukotić, et al. (eds.), *(Anti)liberalizam i ekonomija* [(Anti)liberalism and economy], Institut društvenih nauka, Beograd 2014, pp. 92–106. Cf. Michael Perelman, “Adam Smith: Class, labor, and the industrial revolution”, *Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organisation* 76 (2010) 3, pp. 481–496, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2010.08.003>.

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Cf. Julian Hoppit, “Compulsion, Compensation, and Property Rights in Britain, 1688–1833”, *Past and Present* 210 (2011) 1, pp. 93–128, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtq060>.

for the benevolent “making up of people” (I. Hacking), he is an authoritarian instance which will clear the way by managing the elements of fairness in the market order. *We must pay attention to the fact that the political economy is, at first, a part of the science that deals with legislation and statesman.* Smith has in mind the fact that the statesman will make the society “play” the “game” *between freedom and unfreedom*. Production of economic acts in the name of freedom is not possible without “legislators” with strategic capacities who apply unfreedom. Therefore, they cannot manage freedom without any persistence in authoritarianism.

Michel Foucault dealt with this topic, as well: he follows the path that is different from ours because he analyzes the way “economics is being introduced into political practice”,²⁷ and we direct our attention from politics to economics. However, the result is similar because we both draw the same conclusion and it is *political determination* of economics. Foucault claims that the “economy” is discussed about in the perspective of truth, namely, in the sense that it becomes an “instance of veridiction”. The fact that economic characteristics are set in the political domain in his work has to be understood in the context of “*making up of people*” for the commodity-based economising. The category of *chance* is discovered, and the market becomes *locus* for “autonomous laws of chance” (Hacking). However: “the higher the level of indeterminism in our conception of the world and of people, the higher the expected level of control”.²⁸ Hacking analyses the dynamics of categories of indeterminism in modern understanding, but he does not conclude that we are interested in: *economic reasoning must be understood through the prism of dialectic unity between experience of indeterminism and authoritative “control”, that is, based on mechanism of “making up of people”*.

The most important aspect is the fact that economic reflection has always been involved in the mechanisms of “taming of the chance”. Moreover, it has been involved in mechanisms of promising freedom and in mechanisms of coercion as well. Foucault’s research has to be interpreted in this way: freedom is attributed to the market because it enables inspiration of imagination, an explosion of “creative destruction” for an entrepreneur. The market is a medium of indeterminism for human manifestations. However, it is the mode of market “freedom” that requires an authoritative “policing”, that is, freedom, which is based on indeterminism, but requires comprehensive control, as well.²⁹

Modern economic reflection has ultimately thrown away an attribute of politics and its ambition in terms of self-referentiality ends up by the emergence of “economics”. However, we should explain the difference between the following phenomena: *the economy, economics and economisation*. These terms are impregnated by the main movement that determines the economic meaning from the beginning of modernity: the disassociation from the embeddedness in the patterns of tradition, religion, and metaphysics. Bernard Mandeville famously separated the economic reason from the traditional domain of ethics and his cynical reflections were depicted as the sign of emancipatory progress that proved to be a condition for the “scientificity” of economics. Certainly, a widespread mathematization of economic reflection with the deductive and axiomatic structure of reasoning, which has been criticized nowadays, is based on these processes.³⁰

However, Dumont emphasizes that economic reflection does not fulfil a *modest* ambition to be separated, but it *offensively* intends to *adopt* other domains as well: “industry” is not only an internal economic term, it refers to

the *new*, economized “ethical paradigm”, the “frugality” of “industrial men” determined by unconstrained economizing. Gary Becker is typically explicit in his statements that economics is the only social science which unreservedly affirms the *universalistic* categories such as scarcity and calculation.³¹ Its categories could be applied to all human domains; this fact legitimates its self-hegemonising position. In fact, the scarcity is promoted by economics as the transhistorical impetus that is *prima causa* for the “meta-historical” economising. In accepting the scarcity as the *metacategory*, economists affirm it as the basis for the rationality that connects the instruments and ends: every human being is teleologically predestined to fulfil his destiny by economic reason. In contrast, our genealogical reason demonstrates that scarcity is a fundamental economic determination *only within the concrete politico-economic determinations*: it is not the *prima causa* but the modes of the organisation of the world, but only within capitalism.

The economisation as a processual articulation of the economy is the *immanent determination* of capitalism. The penetration of non-neutral economic meaning in all domains of human life stems from the structural determination of capitalism. And the notion of “economisation” addresses much better the tendencies of this epoch than the usual terms such as *deregulation*.³² A question should be raised: what is the relationship between economics and economisation like? What is the relationship like between (economic) theory and “economic reality”, that is, *effects* of economisation?

We disclaim the concept of neutral theory and understanding of “reality” which is purified from theoretical interventions. Foucault emphasised the role of theory in the appropriation of a domain that “belongs” to him. We can discuss *reflected constructivism*³³ of economics as the constitutive part of the capitalist “reality”, that is, the driving force of the economy and economisation as well. The “economic” reality that is celebrated by economists as neutral is always-already theory-mediated, articulated by the discourses that organize the regularities of the *constructed reality*: the “discursive practice comes into being by way of a violent appropriation of its ‘domain’ -an act of violence that gives birth both to this practice and to its domain. Bearing this co-constitution of ‘theory’ and ‘reality’ in mind, one could rephrase as follows: the reality that any theory is said to be about has already been in some way organised into a

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Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, Gallimard, Paris 2004, p. 98.

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Ian Hacking, *Taming of the Chance*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, p. 1.

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Cf. Bernard E. Harcourt, *The Illusion of Free Market: Punishment and the Myth of Natural Order*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2011, pp. 53–68.

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Cf. Tony Lawson, “Mathematical Modelling and Ideology in the Economics Academy: competing explanations of the failings of the modern discipline?”, *Economic Thought* 1 (2012) 1, pp. 3–22.

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Cf. Alpar Lošonc, “The Interpretation of Crisis from the Spiritual Perspective”, in: Cleveland A. Stark, Dylan C. Bonner (eds.), *Handbook on Spirituality: Belief Systems, Societal Impact and Roles in Coping*, Nova Science Publishers, New York 2012, pp. 35–60.

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Cf. Yahya M. Madra, Fikret Adaman, “Neoliberal Reason and Its Forms: De-Politicisation Through Economisation”, *Antipode* 46 (2013) 3, pp. 691–716, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12065>.

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Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1999, p. 6.

reality *for this theory*”.³⁴ As we see, there is a *double-bind* between economics as the pretender for “absolute scientificity” and economisation.

Practical philosophy confronted with ideology, measure, and content–form–problem

Practical philosophy that we have in mind can offer help in articulation of the following problems: a) ideology, b) the problem of measure, c) the relationship between the content and form.

a) Ideology

A heterodox economist Warren Samuels deconstructed the definition of the main problem of economics by stating that the same definition was determined “ideologically” and it is not the result of “impartial” science.³⁵ In line with this argument, Samuels intends to deconstruct the “ideological” sense of economics and all known categories such as efficiency: yes, efficiency, but for whom? For what? In what contexts? Samuels proposes to mobilise the “metaphysical elements” of the economy against the hegemony of the ideology of positivism that encompasses economic reasoning.

By referring to economic reasoning, Samuels shows the hidden mechanisms in which ideological elements are manifested *in the centre of economisation*: as a critic of the paradigm of representation, it is clear for him that ideology cannot be reduced to cognitive illusion. A “reality” that is purified from ideology cannot be mobilized against the alleged ideological deformation. Thus, Samuels necessarily discovers that the figure of (non)correspondence between (economic) discourse and (economic) “reality” is inadequate for understanding ideology.

The theories of ideology with critical intentions have a standard point, that is, a study of “voluntary subjection to the forms of domination”.³⁶ In case of ideology, it has been frequently emphasized that it is anachronical, that we experience a post-ideological world, but the question is whether is it possible to affirm the critical concept of the world without a critical concept of ideology? Is it possible to consider the ideological effects of economic discourse without the critical³⁷ concept of ideology?

b) Measure

A modern problem of the measuring,³⁸ which is not a passive but self-imposing act concerning the modern objects, occurs in different domains. There is a *constitutive* character of the procedures of measuring that frames the objects, channels the constellation, configurations of the things, and goods. There are different interpretations of the measure. But, it is symptomatic that a philosopher such as Heidegger sets the issues of the measure at the ontological level in his comprehensive account.³⁹ Hegel, for example, highlights the decisive difference between *external* and *immanent* measures: it is a crucial distinction that was also recognized in Marx’s critique of political economy.⁴⁰

The measure is located between us and the modern objectness. It proves to be an indispensable *mediation* between us and things. The problem of the technique of measuring affects the domain of economy and culminates in different procedures of valorisation and quantification. In accordance with the measure, the socio-economic relations can be subordinated to the com-

prehensive quantification and the particular commodities can be qualified as the parts of a homogenised world by equivalences. Therefore, the problems of measuring are brought into the centre of the debate by confronting heterogeneous commodities on the market, or to be more precise, by their original incommensurability.

What is the measure for the incommensurable things as the result of the labour/production and put into the uncertainties of the market? Is the measure the inherent, embodied labour in the commodity as classical economists think, or is the measure the money form as Marx thinks? Marx attributes complex meanings to the category of values: the value is a condensation of different social relations. The conclusion that a capitalist economy is set up as an objective world of equivalents can be drawn from the category of values.

Certain orientations in economic theory (neoclassical) state that the projection of “invariant” value is unnecessary ballast that needs to be thrown out and drawn into the chain of numerical expressions of prices that represent an ultimate arbiter for economic transactions.⁴¹ But, if we consider the values as redundant, the reduction of economic categories to the flux of prices, or surface-mediated categories, diverts our attention from socio-economic determinations. This is always a lesson that can be learned by reading Marx: the value as the expressions of social relations is not only an economical category but the manifestation of the asymmetric interactions that contain exploitation.

There are widespread discussions on the relationship between the measure and “immeasurable”. For example, in the critical accounts of vitalism, the category of life appears to be the horizon of “immeasurable”.⁴² Following this

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Rudi Visker, “Marshallian Ethics and Economics: Deconstructing the Authority of Science” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 18 (1988) 2, pp. 179–199, p. 184, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/004839318801800202>.

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Warren Samuels, *Essays on the Economic Role of Government. Fundamentals*, The Macmillan Press, London 1992, p. 244.

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Jan Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology: The Power of Alienation and Subjection*, Brill, Leiden 2013, p. 5.

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Cf. Rahel Jaeggi: “Was ist Ideologiekritik?”, in: Rahel Jaeggi, Tilo Wesche (eds.), *Was ist Kritik?*, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, Frankfurt a. M. 2009.

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Cf. Witold Kula, *Measures and Men*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1986.

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Werner Marx, *Is There a Measure on Earth?: Foundations for a Nonmetaphysical Ethics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1987, p. 6.

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Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *La théorie de la mesure*, translated by André Doz,

Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1970; Henri Denis, *L'économie de Marx: histoire d'un échec*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1980, p. 91; Frank Engster, *Das Geld als Maß, Mittel und Methode: das Rechnen mit der Identität der Zeit*, Neofelis Verlag, Berlin 2014. In accordance with Engster, the measure is treated in an exceptional way by Hegel and Marx: for Hegel, the mind is the self-relationship; for Marx, there is self-relationship of society by measure. The measure is the self-relationship of society and the basis for social objectivity.

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A value represents a certain type of invariance against constant flux. Cf. Philip Mirowski, “Learning the Meaning of a Dollar: Conservation Principles and the Social Theory of Value in Economic Theory”, *Social Research* 57 (1990) 3, pp. 689–717.

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Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, Autonomedia – Pluto, New York 1991. Michael Hardt and Negri think that “biopolitical products (...) tend to exceed all quantitative measurement”. – Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2009, p. 135.

account, the quantitative measuring is in late capitalism exposed to a crisis due to the expansion of immaterial labour: the surplus of life transcends the quantitative criteria of measuring.

For us, the measure could be treated only in the light of *socially* mediated validation as the process of emerging objectivity: the quantitative magnitudes of value are the manifestation of this objectivity. The main point is the constitution of “social objectivity” by measure and not pure (non-dialectical) opposition between quantity and quality. Also, measuring is not exposed to the crisis only in late capitalism.⁴³ Actually, it is always-already in crisis, i.e. measuring is for all time reorganised by the dynamic of capital as “ends in itself” (Marx, *Selbstzweck*).

We should recall that for Marx, the relationship between the measure and immeasurable is determined by the logic of money as capital, more precisely, this takes place in the process of the validation of value (*Verwertung des Werts*). This “endless movement” is triggered by capital as the representative of “immeasurability” in capitalism.⁴⁴ By affirming itself as the measure, capital *appropriates* the spheres of the immeasurable in capitalism and determines the relationship between measurability and immeasurability.

c) *Form–substance problem*

The Form–substance problem is present in philosophy and the economy. The fact that, in his critique of the political economy, Marx refers to Aristotle as a “great thinker of forms”, who discusses the “social substance of value” when he presents the problem of abstract labour, reminds us of the significance of this topic. It does not mean that he falls into a “substantialist position”⁴⁵ that implies the affirmation of superhistorical category in relation to the form as the effects of “surface”. The author of *Capital* criticizes standard economics for not taking into account the *form* of value, but only the magnitude of values.

Epistemologically, the problem of Form–substance leads to the constitutiveness of *indirect* approach in relation to the “essence”; instead of the strict separation of substance and form, the substance does not outplace the form, but it is realized in various forms. What we have so far is the *form-determination* of our perceptions of economic moments,⁴⁶ the *form-mediated* access to economic things. We are not confronted with the pure, empirical things, with pure wealth but with the *form* of wealth, or *form* of the configuration of the things. Now, the previously mentioned question of value becomes more evident: the value and the price are considered analogously to substance and form. We should add only one thing: *socially*-mediated form, *social* forms, the *socially*-emerged forms shape our economic perceptions. Therefore, the affirmation of economic analysis as a study about social forms in which the economic categories, such as work, are manifested, serves the *critical* goals.

The substance of the economy is non-economic

From the phenomenological perspective, Michel Henry writes:

“The reality of the economy has no realities; it is neither the reality of living individual, nor the reality of the universality of matter. The reality of the economy is created based on the ideal entities that are only unreal representations of the subjectivity of the living individual and its strength (...) the reality is on the other side of economics.”⁴⁷

Henry is critical of the “reality of abstraction” in capitalism, for him, the dominance of abstraction could be derived from the epochal regression of individual phenomenological life: his philosophy is based on the transcendental, self-affective and monadic understanding of subjectivity.

Our orientation does not involve the pattern of transcendental subjectivity of the living individual because we are interested in the *social* genesis of commodity-bias of the modern economy. However, we do accept the conclusion suggested by Henry: there is something *non-economic* in the substance of economics, there is some original relatedness of the economy to non-economic aspects. The fundamentals of the economy lead us to what is non-economic in the heart of the economy itself. And despite the uniqueness of his approach, Henry’s work represents the part of the critical tradition that addresses the problem of the constitution⁴⁸ of objectivity and (crisis-ridden) subjectivity in capitalism. Capitalism enables the *political-economic* constitution of both subjectivity and objectivity. An independent economy can only be imagined together with social mediations between subjectivity and objectivity. And it is not possible to criticise the ideological pretensions of mainstream economics (as the hegemonic interpreter of the capitalist economy) without criticising the appropriate form of subjectivity. *The critical orientation of economic reflections always presents the co-constitutive status of capitalist subjectivity and objectivity.*

It is *political* genealogy of capitalism that contributed to the difference between economy and “non-economy”. However, this separation is never “completed” and is at no time “successful”,⁴⁹ self-differentiation of economics is an “endless” process. Economics is always involved in *dialectics of separation and reconnection*. The economy can never be “definitively” or “finally” purified from non-economic remnants; there is always an “external” element that will infiltrate into the field of economics. The self-purification can never lead to completed self-referentiality of economics. As Kapp emphasizes: “there

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Cf. Frederick Harry Pitts, “A Crisis of Measurability? Critiquing Post-Operadism on Labour, Value and the Basic Income”, *Capital & Class* 42 (2018) 1, pp. 3–21, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309816816665579>.

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The movement of capital is “maßlos”. – Karl Marx, *Das Kapital, Kritik der politischen Ökonomie. Erster Band*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1957, p. 159. English translations emphasize the notion of “limit”, but this term has a special meaning in *Capital*. These translations miss the important point, “validation of value”. Cf. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Capital, Volume I*, Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 163, or Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, Penguin Books, London 1976, p. 253.

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Sven Ellmers, “Abstrakte Arbeit und Anerkennung”, *Zeitschrift für Praktische Philosophie* 4 (2017) 1, pp. 81–108, doi: <https://doi.org/10.22613/zfpp/4.1.4>.

46

Helmut Brentel, *Soziale Form, und ökonomisches Objekt, Studien zum Gegenstands-*

und Methodenverständnis der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, Westdeutscher Verlag, Opladen 1989, p. 7.

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Michel Henry, *Du communisme au capitalisme: théorie d’une catastrophe*, Odile Jacob, Paris 1990, p. 116.

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Frank Engster, “Subjectivity and its crisis: Commodity mediation and the economic constitution of objectivity and subjectivity”, *History of the Human Sciences* 29 (2016) 2, pp. 77–95, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0952695116637282>.

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Visker reaches the similar conclusion but only about separation in comparison to scientific and moral elements of the economy. This problem should be further analysed and understood as the structural dimension of the status of the economy. – R. Visker, “Marshallian Ethics and Economics”.

are no pure economic problems”.⁵⁰ Smith, Hegel and Marx could confirm this account.

We were interested in the complex relationships between economics, the economy, and economisation. The analysis of the origins of economics was carried out based on the belief that *theory is an expression of certain power-based social relationships, that is, the theoretical production is a manifestation of a certain social configuration*. Consequently, the thematisation of the position of economics brings us into the constellation of today’s society. Many theoreticians today believe that economic reflection is in a regressive state.⁵¹ Finally, one of the most well-known early critics of the autonomous economic domain already anticipated this: Thomas Carlyle discussed the emerging economics as “dismal science”. Recently, this figure was revitalized to describe the “destruction” of community-structures by economists.⁵² This is not an internal problem of economic theory, but *an expression of certain socio-economic tendencies*. We can mention here feminist theoreticians who think that economics is a “microcosm of society” and that it reflects the “fantasies about power and hierarchy” that are expressed in the absoluteness of prediction. It is claimed that mainstream economists just enjoy the underlying fantasies that appear in society; the gendered economy is affirmed against these “fantasies”.⁵³ The self-hegemony of economic reflection is not an excessive-mental product of the theoreticians; it is the manifestation of structural tendencies in capitalism determined by (cyclically reorganised) economisation. And the theoretical reflection is not just a “passive” medium that receives non-theoretical impulses but transforms them into *complex relationships between knowledge and power*. The frontier between economic domain and its reflection is more porous than “economics” suggests: the economy does not exist without its *inner Other*.

In conclusion, to confirm: *the substance of the economics is not economic*. Philosophy, whose practical orientation must not be forgotten, can remind us of that.

Alpar Lošonc

Uvjeti kritičkog znanja o kapitalizmu ili: sukob između ekonomije i filozofije

Sažetak

Počinjući s predstavljanjem asimetrije između filozofske i ekonomske refleksije, rad istražuje moguće efekte praktičke filozofije u odnosu spram kritičke analize neovisne oblasti ekonomije. Rad naglašava važnost političke genealogije kapitalizma koja objašnjava konceptualne mutacije što vode do a) autonomizacije ekonomske refleksije, b) samo-hegemonске ekonomske refleksije i c) dominacije »zbiljske apstrakcije« kakva odražava ne toliko mentalne operacije koliko društvenu praksu u kapitalizmu. Važno je osmisliti razlikovanja među ekonomikom, ekonomijom i ekonomskom oblasti, kao i uspostaviti medijaciju među ovim domenama. Važno je da se teorijska proizvodnja ne opaža kao pasivna refleksija vezana za zbilju, nego da se razmatra teoriju kao konstitutivno-praktički faktor, kao zgušnjavanje određenih društvenih odnosa. Za ekonomiku (»turobnu znanost«), to znači da je su-konstitutivna prema »ekonomskoj zbilji«. Praktička filozofija može doprinijeti samosvjesnosti ekonomske refleksije na tri područja: a) važnost ideologije u svezi s autonomijom ekonomske sfere, b) važnost mjere za ekonomizaciju, c) problem oblik-sadržaj. Na osnovi efekata spomenutih domena, praktička filozofija mogla bi pobuditi činjenicu da je jezgra ekonomije nešto što transcendirira fenomen ekonomije. Osnove su ekonomije u ne-ekonomskim kategorijama.

Ključne riječi

roba, kapitalizam, autonomizacija, ekonomska refleksija, mjera, oblik, Karl Marx

Alpar Lošonc

Die Bedingungen des kritischen Wissens über den Kapitalismus oder: der Konflikt zwischen Wirtschaft und Philosophie

Zusammenfassung

Ausgehend von einer Darstellung der Asymmetrie zwischen philosophischer und wirtschaftlicher Reflexion beurteilt der Artikel mögliche Auswirkungen der praktischen Philosophie in Bezug auf die kritische Analyse der unabhängigen Wirtschaftsdomäne. Der Artikel betont die Bedeutung der politischen Genealogie des Kapitalismus, die konzeptuelle Mutationen erklärt, die zu der a) Autonomisierung der ökonomischen Reflexion, b) selbsthegemonialen ökonomischen Reflexion und c) Dominanz der „realen Abstraktion“ führen, die nicht mentale Operationen, sondern vielmehr soziale Praktiken im Kapitalismus widerspiegelt. Es ist notwendig, Unterschiede zwischen Ökonomik, Ökonomie und der ökonomischen Domäne festzustellen, wie auch eine Vermittlung zwischen diesen Bereichen einzurichten. Fernerhin ist es wichtig, die theoretische Produktion nicht als passive Reflexion in Bezug auf die Realität wahrzunehmen, sondern die Theorie als konstitutiv-praktischen Faktor, als Verdichtung bestimmter sozialer Beziehungen einzuschätzen. Für die Ökonomik („düstere Wissenschaft“) bedeutet dies, dass sie in puncto „ökonomischer Realität“ mitkonstituierend ist. Die praktische Philosophie kann in drei Bereichen zur Selbstwahrnehmung der wirtschaftlichen Reflexion beitragen: a) die Relevanz der Ideologie hinsichtlich der Autonomie der Wirtschaftssphäre, b) die Bedeutung der Maßnahme für die Ökonomisierung, c) das Form-Inhalt-Problem. Basierend auf den Auswirkungen in den genannten Bereichen könnte die praktische Philosophie die Tatsache wachrufen, dass der Kern der Wirtschaft etwas ist, was das Phänomen der Wirtschaft transzendiert. Das Fundament der Wirtschaft fußt auf nicht wirtschaftlichen Kategorien.

Schlüsselwörter

Ware, Kapitalismus, Autonomisierung, ökonomische Reflexion, Maßnahme, Form, Karl Marx

Alpar Lošonc

Conditions de la connaissance critique sur le capitalisme ou : le conflit entre l'économie et la philosophie

Résumé

En présentant, au départ, l'asymétrie entre réflexion philosophique et économique, l'article examine les effets possibles de la philosophie pratique par rapport à l'analyse critique du domaine économique indépendant. L'article souligne l'importance de la généalogie politique du capitalisme qui explique les mutations conceptuelles menant à a) une autonomisation de la réflexion économique, b) la réflexion économique auto-hégémonique, c) la domination de l'« abstraction véritable » qui ne reflète pas tellement des opérations mentales, mais des pratiques sociales dans le capitalisme. Il est nécessaire de concevoir des différences entre l'économie, les sciences économiques et le domaine économique, ainsi que d'établir une médiation entre ces domaines. De même, il importe de ne pas percevoir la production théorique Comme une réflexion passive en relation avec la réalité, mais de considérer la théorie comme un facteur constitutif pratique, comme une condensation de certaines relations sociales. Pour les sciences économiques (« science lamentable »), cela signifie qu'elles sont co-constitutives par rapport

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Cf. K. William Kapp, *The Foundations of Institutional Economics*, Routledge, London, New York 2011; Joseph Vogl, *Das Gespenst des Kapitals*, Diaphanes, Zürich 2010, p. 25.

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A famous economist says that economics is “sick”. Cf. Mark Blaug, “Ugly currents in modern economics”, *Options Politiques* 18 (1999) 17, pp. 3–8.

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Cf. Stephen A. Marglin, *The Dismal Science: How Thinking Like an Economist Undermines Community*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2010.

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Vinca Bigo, “Explaining modern economics (as a microcosm of society)”, *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 32 (2008) 4, pp. 527–554.

à la « réalité économique ». La philosophie pratique peut contribuer à la connaissance de soi de la réflexion économique dans trois domaines : a) la pertinence de l'idéologie par rapport à l'autonomie de la sphère économique, b) l'importance de la mesure pour réaliser l'économie, c) le problème de la forme et du contenu. La base de l'économie repose sur des catégories non économiques.

Mots-clés

marchandise, capitalisme, autonomisation, réflexion économique, mesure, forme, Karl Marx