

THINKING OF WORK

EDITORIAL

Spaziofilosofico begins its publication in January 2011 with an issue devoted to “Work.”

Once it would have been normal that a philosophy journal addressed such a theme; today, we think, it might be so again. In 1981, the Italian press Marzorati published an *Anthological History of the Philosophy of Work*, for the series “Great Works,” comprised of 7 volumes and 4,500 pages, and edited by Antimo Negri.

For a long time, it will be difficult to find an analogous project; thirty years after, however, there are conspicuous signs of change. A philosophy of work that is free of ideological prejudices and is rather serious and invested as its object demands that it be might be timely again.

In the age of globalization and, in Italy, the day after the agreement of Pomigliano and Mirafiori, there is more than ever a need to *think* of work.

Spaziofilosofico tries to do this—as it will become its habit—by intersecting the tools of the most rigorous philosophical theory (and why not then speculation?) and of politics; of practices (understood as dissemination of thought competence in the world) and philosophical historiography.

In doing so, *Spaziofilosofico* attempts a difficult, unusual experiment that requires the help of many—that is, the experiment of a possible theoreticity, or of theoreticity for everyone (the “open access” tool is part of such an experiment).

It is not a matter of popularizing. No one who contributes an essay to this journal will be asked to simplify. We do not believe in simplifications. We believe in the social and political relevance of thinking, which, in order to be relevant, must not by any mean cease being rigorous and, in order to be rigorous, must not pay for it with irrelevance.

On careful consideration, Antimo Negri’s work was already a death knell. If one prefers, it was sort of a Noah’s ark that gathered the noblest kinds of philosophies of work after the deluge that had swept away the period of social conflicts. As a matter of fact, it was not the work of a theoretician but of a historian at the beginning of Bettino Craxi’s ten-year period.

Also in 1981, another work, much shorter and somewhat embarrassing, proposed the question of “work” as a problem of the day and not as historical memory. This was the untimely meditation by John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* [On Human Work].

In the encyclical letter, the Pope emphasized “the fact that human work is a *key*, probably *the essential key*, to the whole social question, if we try to see that question really from the point of view of man’s good” (sect. 3). Criticizing the abuses of the so-called originary accumulation, the pontiff remarked that “the error of early capitalism can be repeated wherever man is in a way treated on the same level as the whole complex of the material means of production, as an instrument and not in accordance with the true dignity of his work” (sect. 7). He insisted instead on the necessity of recalling “a principle that has always been taught by the Church: *the principle of the priority of labor over capital*” (sect. 12). As for the property of the means of production, Wojtyła noticed that “they cannot even be *possessed for possession’s sake*, because the only legitimate title to their possession—whether in the form of private ownership or in the form of public or collective ownership—is *that they should serve labor*” (sect. 14). In sum, he claimed, “the position of ‘rigid’ capitalism continues to remain unacceptable, namely the position that defends the

exclusive right to private ownership of the means of production as an untouchable ‘dogma’ of economic life” (sect. 14). In conclusion, Wojtyła stated that work “enters into the salvation process” (sect. 24), having first insistently hammered on one point: “Once more the fundamental principle must be repeated: the hierarchy of values and the profound meaning of work itself require that capital should be at the service of labor and not labor at the service of capital” (sect. 23).

Thirty years afterwards, such words do not seem to have lost their power. Equally untimely, and therefore much more pregnant with a future, are the first words of the democratic Italian constitution: “Italy is a democratic Republic, grounded on work” (art. 1). The connection between democracy and work is today under attack: “The tie between work and democracy . . . has been severely eroded.”¹ As it has been remarked, “precisely in modern work—which is depreciated and made precarious—lies the main factor of contradiction with the domination of a financial oligarchy that presumes to rule the world while breaking the old compromise between capitalism and democracy.”² This is much more worrisome because if there is a lever capable of lifting the social world, such a lever is precisely human work.³ As Mario Dogliani states in the section of this issue devoted to *Politics*, “constitutional references to work are prohibitions with respect to possible ‘repressive’ tendencies of work, tendencies that are perceived as always latent and presently dangerous.” The republican constitution displays “an acute awareness of the persistence of tendencies that, aiming at the compression of wage work, show themselves as destructive of the entire social order.” Therefore, Dogliani concludes, “a non-conciliatory, unsoftened vision of the constitution must be able to read in its words not only promises for the future but also reminders of serious, current risks whose dangerousness may always come back and display itself in virulent forms.” Political powers that are unaware of such risks may lead to disaster.

The contributions gathered in this first issue of *Spaziofilosofico* confront these issues. In many instances, the matter is a re-semanticization of the Marxian concept of “alienated work,” a major concept that continues to impose its influence inexorably attracting philosophical reflections on the topic and forcing them to a measure.

In the section devoted to *Practices*, philosophy directly enters work organizations, and in the section devoted to *Theory*, the fundamental construction site of an anthropology and ontology of work is opened up. Through an analysis of classical and contemporary moments in the philosophy of work, the section devoted to *Studies* present decisive theoretical questions.

Behind us are more than two years that have been very burdensome for most workers, both women and men. This small contribution is for them.

Enrico Guglielminetti
Silvia Benso
Gianfranco Dalmaso
Ugo Perone
Luciana Regina
Brian Schroeder

¹ V. Borghi, “Il lavoro della democrazia, la democrazia del lavoro” *Italianieuropei* 4 (2010): 64.

² A. Reichlin, “Il lavoro e la persona umana,” *Italianieuropei* 4 (2010): 23.

³ *Ibid.*, 26.