

Rosmini: a Philosopher in Search of the Economy

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Introduction: purpose, background and main economic writings

Having developed ideas as comprehensive and deep as those of Hegel or Kant, Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855) is considered one of the most important philosophers of European modernity. However, he was also a practical thinker who gave birth to a social and economic project for the Italy and the Europe of his time. Although Rosmini never wrote a specific book on economic science and he is better known for his political and juridical theories than for his economic ones, he wrote important economic texts dispersed throughout his numerous works. The purpose of the article is, in the first place, to provide an accessible introduction to Rosmini's economic thought showing its amplitude and connection to the history of economic ideas. In the second place, the article attempts to propose an original interpretation of Rosmini's economic thought that differs from the ones proposed by some other Rosminian scholars. Finally, in the third place, the article tries to show the reader the relevance of Rosmini's economic conception and public policy proposals in relation to contemporary economic debate.¹

Being a native of Rovereto (Trentino) – which had long belonged to the Venetian Republic – Rosmini was deeply influenced by the economic spirit of the Italian *città* (small towns). For years the Rosmini family had owned a silk factory in their native city. Although during Rosmini's life the family business

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¹ This article accomplishes in a very incomplete way these three aims which are much better fulfilled in my recently published book about Rosmini's economic thought (Hoevel 2013). In that sense, due to the lack of space, I do not present here the subject in all its complexity and with all the required arguments as I did in the original work. I hope, however, to reach here the purpose of offering the reader a general idea of Rosmini's economic thought along with the main aspects of my own interpretation of its relevance in relation to the history of economic thought.

was already in decline, it infused him with direct knowledge and natural affinity with economic matters. Taking these facts into account, we can better understand his interest in economic thought that he would cultivate all his life (Bulferetti 1942). In fact, as early as 1822, at the age of 25, recently ordained a priest and a laureate in theology, Rosmini wrote his first work on political philosophy – known as his *Politica Prima (First Politics)* or *Politica Roveretana (Roveretan Politics)* – which contains his first essays on economic science (Rosmini 1923, 1933, 2003).

In spite of his openness to economic thought, even at the beginning of his career, Rosmini noticed a central issue in the field of political economy that required attention: the impact of utilitarianism. This led him to a strong and bitter confrontation during his youth with the Italian followers of Helvetius, Maupertuis and Bentham. But it is especially Melchiorre Gioia – a renowned Milanese economist – who Rosmini “chose” as a target for his criticism arguing strongly with him until the former’s death (Donati 1949; Giordano 1976). Even when valuing Gioia’s proposals on progress and well-being, Rosmini rejects the economist’s utilitarian principles, which he finds denaturalizing and destructive for the economy. As a consequence, simultaneously to the essays in the *Politica Prima*, Rosmini publishes a series of controversial articles against Gioia (Rosmini 1976, 1977a, 1978a). Hence, together with the rest of the texts already mentioned, this set of early writings conforms the matrix for Rosmini’s future economic thought.

Between 1826 and 1828 Rosmini lived in Milan where he joins a group formed by Reformists and Catholics – led by Alessandro Manzoni, with whom Rosmini forged a friendship that lasted until his death – which made him re-elaborate his economic ideas in the light of a fresher and modern vision. In fact, Rosmini stopped writing his *Politica Roveretana (Politica Prima)* in Milan to devote his time to three major pieces of writing: his *Frammenti di Filosofia del Diritto e della Politica* – which he used in 1841 to compose his remarkable work on the *Philosophy of Right* –, the *Commentario a la Filosofia Politica* and the essay on *Della naturale Costituzione della società civile*, a book that Rosmini resumed in 1848 but was not published until his death in 1887. In these three texts – the core of what is usually called the *Politica Seconda or Politica Milanese* – Rosmini introduced the prolific topic of natural law into the economic issues of work, inequality, poverty, and the political representation of ownership, amongst others, that deeply shaped his subsequent economic thought (Rosmini 1923, 1933, 2003).

From 1837 until the turmoil of 1848, having already set the most profound bases of his philosophy, Rosmini resumed his original project of writing a comprehensive economic, political, juridical and social philosophy. In this period we find the most mature stage of his project, developed not only in the light of his philosophical principles but also strengthened by his commitment with the dramatic events of the time. Although Rosmini had devoted most of his life to his philosophical writings and his religious activities, he had also always been involved in politics. But it was not until 1848 that Rosmini became a central figure in the Italian political scenario. Aware of Rosmini’s prestige at the Vatican, the

King of Piedmont, Carlo Alberto di Savoia, asked him to persuade the Pope to join his kingdom in a war against Austria in order to achieve the independence and unity of Italy. Rosmini accepted the mission and once in Rome, he tried to convince Pius IX that the Church had to break free from Austria and also accept political constitutionalism. Although this mission was a complete diplomatic failure and meant an excruciating ecclesiastical conflict that sentenced Rosmini to an ostracism within the Church that lasted more than 150 years after his death, his appearance before the Pope's Court highlighted the extraordinary set of his political and juridical ideas and, our present concern, the economic thought that Rosmini had built up through the important writings of the previous ten years (Hoewel 2013).

The most significant work of this period is the *Philosophy of Politics* (1837), a complete re-elaboration of the two early *Politics* we have already referred to. In the first book of the series, *Summary Cause for the Stability and Downfall of Human Societies*, Rosmini elaborates the connection between political and economic calculation, and some concepts on statistics that he will later enlarge in the works that followed. The second part of the *Philosophy of Politics*, entitled *Society and its Purpose* offers an epistemological introduction referring to economic science; the relations between economy, society and happiness. It also goes into a theory of the common good and its connection with the concept of social utility, a theory of needs, the problem of consumerism, competition, labor and the role of political authorities in said issues (Rosmini 1994a, 1994b). The second great work of this period is the *Philosophy of Right* (1841-1845). Its several volumes are loaded with economic concepts and debates: it contains an epistemology opposing utilitarianism, a theory of ownership, economic freedom, price, commercial relationships, economic functions of the government, taxes, economic competition, the distribution of goods and the relationships between economic science and politics (Rosmini 1993a, 1993b, 1995a, 1995b, 1996).

Amongst other essential works we can mention the *Saggio sulla Statistica* (Rosmini [1844]1978a) and the *Saggio sul Comunismo e il Socialismo* (Rosmini [1847]1978b). In the former, Rosmini criticizes the utilitarian-positivist concept of statistics. In the latter, he makes an exhaustive criticism to all types of socialism and shows the severe consequences that governmental control might cause in the economic sphere. Finally, it is worth mentioning two constitutional projects Rosmini writes in 1848 as the most practical and immediately applicable proposals to the crisis of his time. The first one is *La Costituzione secondo la giustizia sociale* (1848) which consists in a detailed portrait of the general juridical framework of society and a series of juridical and political instruments regarding economic policies proposed by the author for the Italy of that time – taxes, free commerce, the State's functions in economic matters and institutions regulating the economy. On the other hand, the second text, entitled *La Costituente del regno dell'Alta Italia* points out Rosmini's theses and politico-juridical proposals regarding poverty and different kinds of social aid provided by the State, the Church and civil society (Rosmini 1952b).

1. Dialogue with economic thought

An outstanding feature of Rosmini's economic thought is its familiarity with the most influential economists of his time. Rosmini was, first and foremost, an enthusiastic reader and a true connoisseur of classical economists such as Smith, Malthus and Say. As regards Adam Smith, the Roveretan had studied his texts since his youth including both his economic writings and his work on ethics and language (Rosmini 1976, 152, n 3; 1994) – and participated in the Scottish economist's breakthrough in Italy.² Rosmini had already made reference to Adam Smith in his *Politica Prima* (Rosmini 1933: 19) in which he refers to him as “an extremely praiseworthy man.”³ In fact, in his argument against Gioia, Rosmini partly leant on Smith's definition of economics as “a science of wealth” (Rosmini 1933: 19). He also considered Smith's labor theory of value as an undeniable achievement⁴ and praised Smith's conception of savings and capital accumulation as the basis of an economy (Rosmini 1978b: 26, footnote 17; Smith 1843: 351); he agreed with the Smithian distinction between productive and unproductive labor (Rosmini 1978b: 21); and shared Smith's criticisms of excessive profit and luxury, and his preference for frugality.⁵ Against the new “industrialists” of his time, Rosmini also sided with Smith in his physiocratic concept of the natural development of the economy.⁶ Finally, Rosmini followed Smith – though keeping certain differences – in his defense of free commerce and competition and in his discontentment with monopolies, the State monopoly in particular (Rosmini 2007: 143; 1993b: 2167-68). Nonetheless, like most Italian economists, Rosmini tended to assimilate Smith's thought in the context of the

² Smith's breakthrough in Italy has been studied by Guidi, Maccabelli and Morato from an interesting point of view (2000).

³ “Il Gioia nel *Nuovo prospetto della scienza economica*, mi sembra però essere stato troppo acerbo in rilevare questo errore dello Smith, uomo per altro degno di tanta lode. Il Gioia è rovesciato in due difetti maggiori...” (Rosmini 1933: 19, n. 1).

⁴ According to Adam Smith, exchange values of goods are determined by the labor time (often measured in hours) that is directly or indirectly required to produce them: “If among a nation of hunters, for example, it usually costs twice the labor to kill a beaver which it does to kill a deer, one beaver should naturally exchange for or be worth two deer.” (Smith 1982, Book 3, Chapter 6: 150). “Dopo Adam Smith nessuno più dubita – Rosmini argues – che il lavoro sia il fonte sommo della ricchezza e che abbia il lavoro ai capitali per usare un modo filosofico, ma ottimamente espressivo, come la forma alla materia.” (Rosmini 1923: 92). See also Adam Smith (1843: 394).

⁵ “Il buon senso di Smith... e di tanti altri scrittori delle cose economiche; i quali senza essere nemici dei piaceri, distinguono però accuratamente fra essi e la ricchezza, e predicano i risparmi, e la moderazione in tutte le cose di lusso e di diletto, perché questi dilette non li considerano come ricchezza, ma bensì come una distruzione della ricchezza...” (Rosmini 1978b: 37). See also Smith (1843 cap.1: 360, 362-71; cap.2: 127-8, 401-2, 442-3).

⁶ “Riguardo alla produzione della ricchezza, qualunque cosa si dica in contrario, la regola fondamentale è di seguire la natura, la quale chiede prima la coltivazione, dipoi l'industria manifattrice, finalmente il commercio.” (Rosmini 1923: 133). See also Adam Smith (1843: 405).

tradition of Italian economists and its related topics of interest,⁷ as well as in function of his own alternative synthesis.

Another influential author of the classical school in Rosmini's thought is Jean-Baptiste Say. Rosmini read Say from a very young age and quoted him repeatedly in *Politica Prima* and in his essays against Gioia, mainly in the *Saggio sulla definizione della ricchezza* (Rosmini 1978a). The Roveretan borrowed a great deal of material from Say to use it later on in his own theory of value. He also assimilated his critique on artificial needs, unlimited luxury and fashion, as well as his suggestions for slow consumption leading to real needs and favoring quality rather than quantity (Say 1854: 322-5). Following Say, Rosmini also criticized the way in which Adam Smith applies his distinction between productive and unproductive consumption and labor.⁸ Say also provided Rosmini with a guide to depart from some of Adam Smith's theses and get closer to the Italian-French conception of the economy centered in subjectivity, without disregarding the elements of the classical British school he finds praise-worthy.

As regards Thomas Malthus, Rosmini quotes him several times in his *Della naturale Costituzione della società civile* (Rosmini 1887: 340) and in *The Summary Cause for the Stability or Downfall of Human Societies*. Somehow following Malthus's arguments against Condorcet and Godwin, Rosmini supported the idea of the existence of limits in the advancement of societies, beyond which they might perish. Besides, Rosmini also agreed with the English economist's well-known arguments on the topic of population,⁹ though he does it in a very different context of ideas and motivations than those of Malthus.¹⁰

Rosmini also opened up a dialogue with the Italian economists. Through these

⁷ Guidi, Maccabelli and Morato (2000) raise several topics for discussion regarding Adam Smith's thought in Italy: the discussion about statistics; the division of society; the debate on factors of production; the debates surrounding productive and unproductive labor, labor division, commercial and industrial protectionism, the countryside-city relationship, development, and the limits of the economic science, among others.

⁸ "(...) conviene risalire alla storia della celebre distinzione di cui parliamo fra' consumi produttori e improduttori. Lo Smith, che la rese celebre, certo non giunse a tirar fra essi la linea di separazione esattamente, giacché pose fra le classi consumatrici e improduttrici di quelle a cui non si può negare la facoltà di produrre. Il Say rettificò, in gran parte almeno, l'inesattezza dello Smith." (Rosmini 1978b: 29). Although, as we have argued before, Rosmini accepts Smith's distinction between productive and unproductive consumption and labor, he amplifies, following Say, the spectrum of activities that could be considered "productive", such as personal services and other kind of immaterial activities.

⁹ "The fact is [that there is a] natural law according to which every population grows. The human race increases naturally by geometrical progression, whereas subsistence, the produce of the earth, can increase only by arithmetical progression. However, even this progression cannot continue, as that of population does." (Rosmini 1994a: 91-2).

¹⁰ Rosmini seems not to have taken an interest in other classical economists such as David Ricardo or John Stuart Mill. In relation to the former, it is highly probable that the Roveretan would share the negative opinions of the Italian economists who considered Ricardo an abstract, quite unclear author. When it comes to Stuart Mill, his writings were not circulating in the times of Rosmini's education and were probably not abundant later in Italy either, which would explain this notable absence in his works.

authors he got to know a conception of the economy based on the idea of happiness, which in the *Settecento* reintroduced the traditions of Second Scholastics and of Renaissance humanism, in opposition to the conception of “security of power” which is present in Machiavelli and Giovanni Botero,¹¹ or to the more chrematistic vision of Anglo-Saxon authors. Another characteristic of the Italian economic philosophy which Rosmini incorporates is its “civil” character, a heritage he receives from Vico.¹² Using the well-known collection *Scrittori classici italiani di economia politica* by Custodi, he became acquainted, on the one hand, with well-known Italian thinkers of the first part of the *Settecento* like Ludovico Antonio Muratori and Carlo Antonio Broggia, who inspired him to incorporate some of the moral and economic elements of his reform plan (Venturi 1969: 97). Amongst the Italian economists of the second half of the *Settecento*, Rosmini was especially inspired by Gaetano Filangieri, Antonio Genovesi and Giuseppe Palmieri from the Neapolitan School, by Pietro Verri and Cesare Beccaria from the Milanese School, by the Venetians Francesco Mengotti and Giammaria Ortes, and by Giambattista Vasco from Turin. Rosmini will make a deep and critical study and use of these authors’ texts, included in the Modern Part of Custodi’s collection, and will hold a dialogue with them about varied topics as the relationship between economy and happiness, consumption, labor, taxes, market freedom and poverty, amongst others (Hoevel 2009).

Rosmini’s dialogue with the Italian economists reached its peak with Melchiorre Gioia and Giandomenico Romagnosi, two main representatives of the Risorgimento and Rosmini’s contemporaries (Greenfield 1934; Hoevel 2012). The Roveretan saw in Gioia’s project an utilitarian attempt to absorb ethics into economic science and to reduce right to subjective interest.¹³ According to Rosmini, Gioia promoted a kind of subjectivist economism in which consumption becomes the economic action *par excellence*, and the distinction between productive and unproductive consumption disappears. Rosmini also criticized Gioia’s praise of fashion – interpreted as the process of permanent changes in tastes and needs – understood as the key for a dynamic economy. Besides, according to Rosmini, Gioia’s empiricist and utilitarian philosophy invalidates his attempt to found an ethical and civil economy. However, despite his criticism against Gioia’s utilitarian propositions, it was probably the reading of Gioia which warned Rosmini about the excessively chrematistic view of the British economists and helped him to confirm and make explicit the idea of the ethical,

¹¹ “Nei secoli precedenti in Italia si parlava di ‘felicità pubblica’, ma in termini di ‘sicurezza del potere’. Giovanni Botero (*La ragione di stato*, 1598), la definiva ‘il modo di tener contenti e quieti i popoli’” (Parisi 1984: 96, n 128).

¹² Following Vico’s idea that society is a direct derivative of man’s “civil nature”, many Italian thinkers of the *Settecento* will see the economy not just as a space of utilitarian exchanges but as a reality embedded in “civil” relations, that is, in relations of reciprocal recognition of citizens through the exercise of virtues.

¹³ “(...) in Italia udimmo, alcuni anni sono, talun pretendere(n. 1 Il Gioia), che la morale fosse un ramo di economia” (Rosmini 1941: 161).

juridical and civil relations in which he considered that economy should be placed (Barucci, 1965)¹⁴.

As regards Giandomenico Romagnosi, Rosmini established a somewhat similar kind of troubled and at the same time assimilative relationship. Romagnosi's utilitarianism – though weaker than Gioia's – certainly represented to Rosmini the counter-model of his own intellectual project. The Roveretan devotes long passages of his works to a detailed refutation of Romagnosi's ethical, social and juridical conceptions.¹⁵ Rosmini accused Romagnosi of confusing virtue with utility (Rosmini 1941: 167) and despite his intentions to reach a widened utilitarianism, of reducing every human motivation to mere interest.¹⁶ Nonetheless, in spite of these differences, Rosmini took from Romagnosi many particular elements such as the acceptance of the ideas of competition, labor division and market freedom.¹⁷ Besides, Rosmini showed agreement with Romagnosi's appreciation of the “mechanical” side of Smith¹⁸ but also with his criticism of the latter's work, sharing too his intention of achieving a more complete economic science¹⁹, neither “fragmentary” nor separated from the rest of the social philosophy (Romagnosi 1845, vol 6: 78-9).²⁰

Other authors with a significant impact on Rosmini's economic thought are the

¹⁴ In fact, Rosmini seems to borrow from Gioia a “humanistic” conception of production synthesized in the triad *sapere, volere, potere* (knowledge, power and will): “Laonde sarà sua cura [del governo] di rimuovere l'ignoranza, i pregiudizi, le consuetudini nocive alla produzione, e con premi ed altri incitamenti guiderdonare i più attivi e incoraggiare i meno... In una parola il governo potrà accrescere le tre forze da cui nasce l' acceleramento della produzione, il sapere, il volere, il potere...” (Rosmini, 2003: 369). In a similar way, in the *Nuovo Prospetto delle scienze economiche* Gioia addresses the issue of Power (*Potere*) in the Libro secondo, Classe Prima: 66-239, the issue of Knowledge (*Cognizione*) in the Classe Seconda: 240-55 and the issue of Will (*Volontà*) in the Classe Terza: 256-75. This triad implied both to Rosmini and to Gioia the “humanistic” idea that the economy is not just the result of a merely material dynamics (technology, division of labor) but also of human factors like power, culture and ethics. However, the difference between the two authors lies in the way they both understand this humanism. Gioia develops a utilitarian humanistic economy, while Rosmini develops a personalist humanistic economy.

¹⁵ “Come la falsa definizione che danno gli utilitarii del diritto confonda insieme le due scienze della politica e del diritto” (Rosmini 1995, libro V, cap. III: 1251).

¹⁶ “La parola *moralità* adunque usata così spesso del nostro publicista, come pure l'espressione *ordine morale di ragione, legge naturale, giusto ed onesto*, ecc. Non possono più ingannare nessuno... in questo sistema sensista ed utilitario, è manifesto, che la dottrina del giusto si riduce alla dottrina dell'utile.” (Rosmini 1995: n. 1740).

¹⁷ Rosmini obtains these ideas from the direct reading of Adam Smith's works, but also from Romagnosi, one of the authors who introduced Smith in Italy: “In tempo della gioventù di Romagnosi arrideva generalmente agli italiani la smithiana dottrina; e però non è a stupire che questo filosofo abbracciatala, la mantenesse colla solita sua costanza, e l'applicasse altresì ampiamente alle politiche cose” (Rosmini 1988: 380). See also Rosmini's criticism against Romagnosi regarding the “invisible hand” (1994b: 395, footnote 5).

¹⁸ “Lo studioso pertanto non abbisogna di molto affaticarsi su le opere straniere, tranne quella di Adam Smith, per la parte meccanica dell'economia.” (Romagnosi 1845:79).

¹⁹ “(...) Romagnosi has a more complex view than his predecessors, and feels the need to accept and take account of all elements (...)” (Rosmini 1994a: 140 n. 1)

²⁰ See especially “Preface to the Political Works” (Rosmini 1994a: 61).

Swiss Karl Ludwig von Haller, Simonde de Sismondi and the utopian socialists. As regards Haller, author of the *Restauration des Staatswissenschaft*, even though Rosmini looked up to him, especially in his youth, he did not adhere eventually to his patrimonialist political theory due to the influence of the classical and Italian economists and his inclination towards constitutionalism. Nonetheless, Rosmini discovered through Haller the importance of liberal economic principles like the respect for private property, industry and private initiative, a moderate tax policy, as well as other specific criteria about financial and social policies, amongst others²¹ (Haller, 1963, vol 2: 232 and ff.).

Rosmini seems also to bear in mind, especially in the *Saggio sulla definizione della ricchezza*, the early Sismondi of *De la richesse commerciale* (1803), a piece of writing in which its author adheres to the British classical economists almost without hesitation. Yet, Rosmini was also influenced by the *Nouveaux principes d'économie politique, ou de la richesse dans ses rapports avec la population* (1819) written by the Swiss economist after his famous trip to England where he came face to face with the social evils of the industrial revolution and addressed his well-known critique against Adam Smith and the principles of classical political economy (Rosmini 2003: 297, 350). Rosmini seems to follow Sismondi almost to the letter on his judgments about England's questionable prosperity (Sismondi 1974: 10-11; Rosmini 1901: 6). He also coincides with him in his critique against the reduction of the politico-economic problem to mere *laissez-faire* (Sismondi 1974: 8). In fact, they both believed that excessive competition tends to be harmful for the poorest in society (Rosmini 1994b: 570; 1993: n 2298, footnote). Thus, Rosmini seems to follow closely Sismondi's opinions in favor of the integration of political economy with ethics (Sismondi 1974: 9)²² and against the reduction of politics to the production of material goods, population growth or the mere satisfaction of material needs²³. Remarkable similarities in his works seem to point out that the Roveretan could have obtained from Sismondi part of the inspiration for his thesis on the "equilibrium" or "proportion" the legislator must "calculate" (Sismondi 1974: 47; Rosmini 1923: 177) in order to regulate the different factors of production, income, population and consumption,²⁴ even though they also

²¹ Although from a political point of view Haller is clearly an anti-liberal author and therefore opposed to Rosmini, from an economic point of view he has some liberal ideas that had a strong influence on the Roveretan, especially in his early period. Besides, Rosmini also seems to have shared with Haller the idea that a policy of economic liberalism does not eliminate the importance of the role of the State in some issues while avoiding centralization and bureaucratization.

²² See also Antonio Rosmini (1994b: 61).

²³ "Lo scopo del governo non è, astrattamente parlando, l'accumulazione delle ricchezze nello stato (...)" (Sismondi 1974: 23). See also "The Error of Those Who Tend to Materialise Society." (Rosmini 1994b: 265).

²⁴ (Sismondi 1974: 12). In a similar way, Rosmini has always considered that the economic system is not an autonomous mechanism. On the contrary, according to him, the economy is just one of the many systems that conform a society's balance. Indeed, through his *doctrine of balances*, Rosmini explains how wealth creation towards which the economy must point should be reached

agreed that said regulation must be predominantly indirect.²⁵ Nevertheless, they both criticized the temptation to sort out the problem of the unjust outcomes of the market by means of an abstract egalitarianism (Sismondi 1974: 24; Rosmini 1994b: 520). However, Rosmini shows a much more emphatic rejection to any ‘socialist’ or collectivist solution to the social problem than Sismondi.

As regards socialist economists, though Rosmini did not have contact with Marxism, he did study with great interest the utopian socialists like Morelly, Godwin, Enfantin, Babeuf, Owen, Fourier and Saint Simon, who he will always take into account as a permanent counterpoint in the formulation of his own theses. This can be easily seen in his *Philosophy of Politics* and the *Philosophy of Right*, but, above all, in the *Saggio sul Comunismo e il Socialismo*. By making use of primary sources like the *Doctrine de Saint-Simon*, or secondary sources like the *Études sur les Réformateurs ou socialistes modernes Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, Robert Owen* by M. Louis Reybaud, Rosmini criticized the Saint-Simonians’ State planning proposals, Owen’s cooperative movement, Fourier’s harmonious association based on the total liberation of passions, and Babeuf’s mandatory and socially planned work (Rosmini 1978a: 86, 88, 90, 95). In addition, Rosmini sees in socialism the birth of a new secularized and deformed social religion (Rosmini 1994b: 446; Traniello 1997: 167).

Finally, it is worth mentioning Rosmini’s close readings of Aristotle, especially in relation to the latter’s renowned critique of “unnatural chrematistics”, (Rosmini 1994b: 608-609, footnote)²⁶ and of scholastics such as Aquinas and thinkers of the so called “Second Scholasticism” such as Suárez, Navarro, Lugo, Molina, Sánchez or Vásquez whose influence can be seen especially in his *Philosophy of Right* in matters like contracts, just price, or the right of ownership (Rosmini 1993a: n 1152, footnote 280).²⁷ It is also necessary to mention the influence on Rosmini’s economic thought of moralists and political philosophers like Mandeville, Hume, Ferguson, Stewart, Reid, Bentham or Benjamin Franklin; historians such as Blackstone, Robertson, Young, Reynal, Cobbet, Mably, Sidney, Squire and Wallace; political philosophers like Locke, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Harrington, Tocqueville, Constant, Hamilton, Madison and Jay; economists of the German and French tradition like Sonnenfels, Dutot, Droz., G.F.L. Comte

taking into account balance with other factors such as the population size, political and military power, culture and, above all, virtue.

²⁵ “Ma, per condurre in porto queste riforme, suggerisco soltanto che si usino i mezzi lenti e indiretti della legislazione” (Sismondi 1974: 469).

²⁶ Rosmini cites the famous Aristotelian critique of “unnatural chrematistics” in relation to the ethically destructive potential of the abstract nature of money. He is also strongly influenced by Aristotle in his treatment of the subject of the role of material goods in relation to happiness. Finally, Rosmini’s Aristotelian influences can also be seen in his treatment of the relationship between ethics and politics.

²⁷ It has not yet been studied in sufficient depth the specific influence of these authors of the Second Scholasticism on Rosmini especially on economic issues.

or Dunninger who are constantly quoted by our author.²⁸ Besides, there is a decisive role played in Rosmini's economic thought by the analysis of practical experiences, which he gathered from the works of ministers and officials of economic affairs like Lichtenstern, Huskisson, Colbert, Sully, Necker or Guizot. Finally, Rosmini developed along his life an extended dialogue on economic issues with his close friend Alessandro Manzoni as can be seen through their rich correspondence (Bonola 1901).

2. Interpretations

After having presented in a rather unsystematic and general way some of the sources of Rosmini's ample economic influences, we come naturally to the question concerning the position and the relative weight each of them has had on Rosmini's thought. Was Rosmini a follower of Haller, of classical economists, of Italian economists or of Sismondi? Answering this question would also lead to a detailed and well argued discussion of the different existing interpretations of Rosmini's economic thought, something that I have done elsewhere. (Hoevel 2008, 2013). However, I will try here to present at least a general view of some of these interpretations of Rosmini's economic thought in order to introduce my own theoretical approach to the subject.

The interpretation of Rosmini's economic thought presented in this article contrasts, in the first place, with the theses held by Gioele Solari (2000) and Danilo Zolo (1963), who are deeply influenced, in my opinion, by the historiographic interpretation that portrays Rosmini as a traditionalist thinker – basically a follower of Haller – whose acceptance of modernity is always partial and, hence, is incapable of dealing with the socioeconomic issues of his time.²⁹ However, I believe that this approach can only be applied to some aspects of Rosmini's early texts – and surely not to all of them – for it disregards the evolution towards modernity that exists in most of Rosmini's social and economic proposals. For the rest, through a systematic presentation and interpretation of Rosmini's socio-economic texts, I have tried elsewhere to show that Rosmini's economic philosophy is not an inferior by-product of his thought or a mere ideological projection of his social class but an organically and theoretically integrated part of his whole philosophy (Hoevel 2013).

²⁸ Rosmini quotes all these authors in different contexts and for different purposes. I explain some of the influences of these authors in Rosmini's economic thought in Hoevel (2013).

²⁹ "Following Haller's footsteps, Rosmini was a prisoner of nostalgia (...). He did not show (and the critiques to Smith and Gioia reveal it) sympathy nor understanding for the new industrial economy based on labor, capacity and personal initiative, nor for the new social lifestyles based on them which had found in revolution adequate political forms." (Solari, 2000: 28) (Our Translation) "Di fronte a certe pagine rosminiane (...) non può che riflettere sulla crisi profonda che ha investito la coscienza cattolica nel primo 800 [...] Il liberalismo rosminiano mostra ... la sua origine aristocratica e il suo orizzonte classista ..." (Zolo 1963: 309).

In the second place, I also differ from Pietro Piovani's view of a simple identification of Rosmini's economic thought with the classical economic school represented by Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus or Jean-Baptiste Say.³⁰ According to Piovani, the primary aim of Rosmini's social and economic thought was to defend the Christian-rooted classical theodicy by leaning on new socially oriented arguments.³¹ Furthermore, in Piovani's opinion, Rosmini would have discovered that classical economics acts as the key mediator between politics and theodicy.³² Given this assumed harmony between the liberal classical doctrine and Rosmini's economic thought, Piovani makes the claim that "if the liberal economy did not exist, Rosmini to be consistent with his own ideas, would have had to invent it." (Piovani 1957: 79) I think that the arguments held by Piovani, although brilliant, suffer both from some historico-philological and theoretical flaws. In regard to the former, it is true that Rosmini assimilates the ideas of the classical economic school. However it is also true that he criticizes some important aspects of them. In fact, an in-depth analysis of the Roveretan's works leads to the conclusion that the problem of economic science does not stem only from statist economists like Gioia or the utopian socialists, as it is argued by Piovani, but also from individualist liberal economists such as Mandeville, Malthus, Say and Smith. Rosmini's economic texts show that his project did not consist in resuming the original individualism of economic science in order to go back to its cultural origins, as Piovani assures, but, on the contrary, in rescuing classical political economy from its utilitarian and empiricist origins, by reconstructing its philosophical foundations from the root.

In this sense, I follow authors such as Marco Minghetti (1868), Luigi Bulferetti (1942), Anton Ferrari (1954), Clemente Riva (1958), Francesco Traniello (1966, 1997) Paolo De Lucia (1995) and Mario D'Addio (2000), from whom I obtained some fragmentary and implicit intuitions and arguments. Thus, I hold both a historical and theoretical thesis about Rosmini's economic thought. With respect to the historical aspect, I support the idea of the evolution of Rosmini's thought from Haller's patrimonialism to classical economic thought. However, I also believe that though this evolutionary line is important, it is certainly not the only one. In fact, in Rosmini's economic thought there is also a strong influence, as I have shown in section 2, of the humanistic perspective of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Italian economists and of other authors such as Sismondi.³³ This is mainly revealed, from the theoretical point of view, in the

³⁰ "[...] il suo sforzo non è in contrasto con i concetti dell'economia classica: Rosmini economista non tarda, perciò, a notare questa sintomatica mancanza di contrasto, che, per i tratti in cui il cammino è comune, può essere sostanziale concordia." (Piovani 1957: 74).

³¹ "In una teodicea che sente l'esigenza di completare se stessa con tutto un capitolo dedicato al male sociale, l'economia diventa la metodologia della giustificazione delle ineguaglianze economiche della società[...]." (Piovani 1957: 95)

³² "Senza l'aiuto dell'economia, non sarebbe possibile la collaborazione tra scienza politica e teodicea" (Piovani 1957: 94).

³³ However, I do not agree with Luigi Bulferetti's thesis about a "Rosmini rosso", that is, a Sismondian or Christian-socialist Rosmini as he argues in his work *Socialismo Risorgimentale* (1949),

importance given by Rosmini to the issue of happiness and eudemonology in his economic writings – a central idea in the Italian economic doctrines of the eighteenth century – in order to solve the problem of the ethical foundation of the economy.³⁴ In fact, I believe that the core of Rosmini's economic conception is based on an anthropological and ethical critique of the subjectivist and utilitarian assumptions of both British and continental economic science and on a proposal for its replacement by a new personalist approach with clear juridical and political consequences as we shall see.

3. The Copernican turn: The replacement of utilitarianism by personalism

According to Rosmini, political economy had been dominated by utilitarianism since its origins in the eighteenth century.³⁵ Thus, a starting point for understanding Rosmini's economic thinking can be the reading of his economic texts in the light of his debate with utilitarianism and in the light of his anthropology and his ethics. What emerges as a result is a new conception of economic rationality which he later introduces in all his orientations in the field of economic policy giving them a distinct profile compared with other approaches. A classic place to address this important issue is Rosmini's short *Essay on the Definition of Wealth* (*Saggio sulla definizione della ricchezza*, 1978), where he shows a remarkable degree of assimilation of what the economists of his time had already discovered on the rationality of economic action. In fact, Rosmini develops analytically different notes that characterize the latter that are very close, as noted by Augusto Graziani (Graziani 1912: 211) to the theory of subjective value or the theory of marginal utility discovered later by the neoclassical school. Certainly Rosmini never knew this last theory – still dominant in contemporary economics – which arises only in 1871 with the so-called Marginalist revolution, but he came very close to its theses and saw with remarkable precision its future problems. Following the analysis of authors such as Say, Sismondi and Gioia, who had already developed a relatively elaborated theory of utility to complement the labor theory of value held by Adam Smith, Rosmini understood the importance of the ideas of utility and subjectivity to understand the dynamics of economic rationality. In this regard, Rosmini describes economic rationality

which was at the time rightly criticized by Piovani (1951).

³⁴ See this crucial point also in Traniello (1997: 25).

³⁵ Rosmini laments the triumph of utilitarianism in all sciences: “Dalla sovversione anzi dall'annientamento della Filosofia operato nel secolo scorso dagli autori del sensismo, guazzabuglio di negazioni e d'ignoranze, che sotto il nome assunto di filosofia invase tutta l'Europa con più detrimento del vero sapere, che non vi avesse recato giammai alcuna invasione barbarica, derivò quella corruzione profonda della Morale, del Diritto, della Politica, della Pedagogia, della Medicina, della Letteratura, e più o meno di tutte l'altre discipline, della quale noi siamo testimoni e vittime (...) le passioni e l'ignobile calcolo degli interessi materiali sono divenuti l'unico consigliere, l'unico maestro delle menti...” (Rosmini 1934: 19).

as the process of searching for satisfaction of desires and subjective needs of individuals through goods or services at the lowest cost and with the maximum benefit through the mediation of a negotiated price emerged from a particular market (Rosmini 1978a: 16-7, fn).

According to Rosmini, this definition of economic rationality is nevertheless insufficient. Probably some of the best places where Rosmini addresses this problem are his epistolary exchanges with Alessandro Manzoni (Rosmini 1901) and his polemical essays with Gioia (Rosmini 1976, 1977). Using the emphatic language of the time, he argues that this conception of economic rationality, correct in principle, can become a destructive theory if is conceived separately from the rest of human action. In fact, a conception of economic rationality as a mere technique of effective satisfaction of any desire as long as it is considered useful to someone becomes, in his opinion, a sophisticated and indirect legitimization of subjectivism and utilitarianism coated with scientific language. The implicit assumption that Rosmini discovers in the utilitarian economists of his time leads finally to conceive the economy as the highest form of rationality, absorbing all other forms of human action (Rosmini 1996: n 1740). According to Rosmini, the utilitarian conception that reduces economic action to the maximization of personal pleasure, utility or interest is inherently destructive not only for the human being in general, but for the economy in particular.

Reducing everything – writes Rosmini – even the notion of wealth itself, to pleasures, and without anything to regulate and direct these pleasures beyond themselves, political economy is destroyed, left to hang on its absolute empire, where there is no rule above itself and its pure caprice. (Rosmini 1976: 29)

Besides these rather negative arguments, Rosmini provides also significant positive theoretical foundations for an alternative theory of economic rationality based on his personalist philosophy.³⁶ According to him, the human person has certainly a subjective and self-interested dimension but what governs her in the first place is the capacity for recognition of the objective and intrinsic logic of reality.³⁷ This point of departure modifies completely the way in which human

³⁶ I use the term “personalism” to make reference to the crucial role that the idea of person plays in Rosmini’s philosophy. Certainly Rosmini can be justifiably considered as one of the predecessors of contemporary Christian personalism. However, his social and economic conception has very different roots and motivations from the ones of some of the twentieth century’s Christian personalists such as Mounier or Maritain.

³⁷ According to Rosmini, this is possible, firstly, because the capacity of intellectual knowledge present in human beings is essentially different from sensitive knowledge, contrary to the arguments held by utilitarians of every kind (Rosmini 1988: n. 13). Secondly, Rosmini argues that this capacity of objective knowledge is possible due to the existence in human beings of what he calls “the idea of being”, a fundamental thesis of his entire philosophical system (Rosmini 1987: 1068). In addition, objective value judgments and, therefore, free acts that characterize human rationality cannot be explained, according to Rosmini, only through the mere capacity of objective knowledge of the intelligence, but mainly through the subject’s active voluntary and free capacity of “recognizing” what the intelligence “knows.”

action is deployed. Whereas for utilitarians, human action can be explained just by the logic of utility or self-interest, for Rosmini it is governed by a *personal* dimension whose developmental logic is essentially different from the *natural* dimension that is the only one taken into account by utilitarians. Indeed – he argues – “all the powers forming part of an individual constitute the individual’s *nature*, but the individual’s *person* is constituted by the most noble power and highest active principle, that is, the rational power.” (Rosmini 1991: n. 851) In other words, what firstly governs the person is the objective reality of things, of other persons, of her own self and of the different concrete situations she is called to recognize.

Therefore, although our economic activities are fundamentally oriented to the satisfaction of our subjective needs and desires, such acts are always mixed with acts of personal and moral evaluation of other aspects of the goods assessed and related to other goods of reality in general as well. In this regard, economic action includes, at the same time a subjective and an objective dimension. Although the logic of utility does not disappear, it becomes part of the greater whole of the total rationality of the person. Economic actions never occur alone: they are always integrated into a personal action whether moral or not. Rosmini thus distinguishes between ethics, which studies the personal dimension of human actions and eudemonological sciences, such as economic science, that study their subjective results. Given the preeminence of personal rationality in every human action, every subjective improvement in the economic field becomes hierarchically subordinated to personal improvement. According to Rosmini, the problem of conventional economic science has always been to simplify or ignore the complex interaction between these two types of human flourishing (Rosmini 1981: n. 852-3).

4. Consequences at the microeconomic level: the role of contentment in consumption and work

The implications of this thesis are vast in all economic fields, in the first place at the microeconomic level. A first key concept that undergoes a profound change from the personalist theory of economic action is the concept of consumption which in Rosmini is very different to the utilitarian interpretation. In fact, in the utilitarian conception the process of satisfaction of needs, is governed by a completely subjective logic that the economist is not called upon to judge. Thus, his work is limited to ensure the most efficient satisfaction of subjective preferences or desires. Besides, the constant and rapid emergence and proliferation of new desires is usually seen as the engine of the economy.³⁸ The economic problem

³⁸ Rosmini cites Gioia as one of the representatives of this position: “The basic means to enhance a country’s civilization – writes Gioia quoted by Rosmini – consist in the increment of the intensity and number of needs, and in the acknowledgement of the objects that satisfy them. Since the amount of desires is always higher than the amount of desired objects, by raising the amount of

lies rather in guiding through appropriate incentives the infinite multiplication of desires for the benefit of all individuals involved.

According to Rosmini, this view ignores the central fact that the multiplication of needs and desires is not always an advantage in itself and may even end up destroying those who are possessed by them. In fact, in order to understand the true dynamics of consumer needs one must first understand the overall dynamics of personal desire which Rosmini explains through the concept of “contentment” (*appagamento*). In Rosmini’s view, contentment is a subjective state very different from the simple satisfaction of a desire or utility described by conventional economists. On the one hand, this is not just a physical satisfaction or a psychological pleasure but one which follows the orientation of the person, therefore dependent on their intellectual and moral structure. It is not the same to be happy as to feel pleasure (Rosmini 1994: 392-3). On the other hand, human contentment implies a moral recognition of the objectivity of economic goods, and therefore, a minimum of moral virtue. Thus, according to Rosmini, consumer’s satisfaction cannot be reduced to a mere subjective state. Consumption reduced to the purely subjective satisfaction of needs, and thus disconnected from the personal and ethical dimension, would destroy itself since “whenever good of any kind is incompatible with virtue, it ceases to be human good” (Rosmini 1994b: 75).

Rosmini reaffirms the distinction made by classical economists between productive and unproductive consumption. In his opinion, “there is undoubtedly a way of consuming wealth that is disadvantageous for its reproduction; as it is also clear that there are other ways of consuming that bring about a reproduction of wealth...” (Rosmini 1978: 21). Besides, he reassures us of the need to follow the golden rule on the balance between expenditure and income³⁹ and criticizes the constant promotion of desires and needs proper of consumerist societies.⁴⁰ However, his original contribution about this matter is his development of a basic grammar of consumption, in which he states the idea that not any use of a good, no matter the subjective utility it may provide, implies the creation of true economic value or wealth increase (Rosmini 1978: 19). According to Rosmini, the concept of consumer satisfaction is always relative to the valuation of the person, who is constantly changing and evolving as time goes by and different circumstances emerge. Nevertheless, the problem is not the complexity and spring of new needs, but rather their quality and their relationship to the parallel evolution of moral and economic capacities to satisfy them. Therefore, Rosmini’s main criterion as regards consumption consists in the person developing economic

the former, men are consequently in a constant state of hunger, a state that becomes the cause of a perpetual movement.” (Rosmini 1994b: 317 and 1933: 55)

³⁹ “Shouldn’t consumption be proportional to profits?” (Rosmini 1923: 94).

⁴⁰ “The supposition that human beings are always stimulated to industrious activity by the pressure of increased needs is false. In certain circumstances the pleasure only produces impoverishment and even extreme misery of peoples, who give up what is necessary for their existence in order to satisfy the irresistible urgency of their needs (...)” (Rosmini 1994b: 324-39).

needs for real objects or goods rather than for intellectual fictions understood as substitutes of impossible and unlimited satisfactions.⁴¹

A second fundamental microeconomic concept of Rosmini's personalism is his conception of work and productive activities. In the *Politica Prima*, Rosmini mentions his agreement with Adam Smith's criticism of accumulation of wealth by predatory methods, as in the case of the Roman soldiers, feudal Lords, Spanish conquerors and modern mercantilist governments. Rosmini appreciates the Smithian labor theory of value and joins the economist in praising frugality, saving, (Rosmini 1978: 26, footnote 17) productivity (Rosmini 1978: 21) and a moderate lifestyle as the bases for a labor culture. Nevertheless, Rosmini borrows from Say in order to depart from some of Smith's theses, and goes even deeper when he approaches economists like Genovesi, Sismondi and Droz in his call to integrate his theory of labor into a wider anthropological theory (Rosmini 1994a: appendix 2, 121).

According to Rosmini, work is a fundamental activity of the human being who, through the efficient use of economic means, frees himself from the yoke of necessity and is able to apply to "the culture of his heart" (Rosmini 1887: 99). By virtue of this anthropological concept that goes far beyond the concept of labor as mere workforce, it is not possible to think that work can be simply managed by external incentives. In his opinion, the principle of subjective utility alone cannot form the basis for the worker's action. Thus, Rosmini stresses the importance of intellectual capabilities in the encouragement of human and economically productive labor. Rosmini claims that capital is only raised if there exists in people some degree of "love of wealth and social influence," (Rosmini 1994b: 342) "desire for new needs," (Rosmini 1887: 205) "dominion over himself to defer the satisfaction of his desires," (Rosmini 1994b: 327) use of "intelligence," (Rosmini 1887: 205) "increase of reflections," (Rosmini 1887: 205) a deeper "attention capacity" (Rosmini 1887: 205) and a capacity for "foresight," (Rosmini 1994b: 327) amongst others. Productivity is, thus, the result of "a full knowledge of the use of wealth" and of a "hierarchical development of ideas" (Rosmini 1887: 206) rather than just the result of mere accumulation driven by external material incentives, division of labor or by a abundance of natural resources "When civil society is culturally developed – argues Rosmini – wealth prevails" (Rosmini 1887: 206, n. 1). In a word, progress in capital accumulation implies "the same degree of progress in man's spirit" (Rosmini 1887: 204).

But above all capacities there stand the moral capacities as the ultimate source which enriches and organizes work: "moral stimulus of one's own duty, which foresees and provides for the future necessities of domestic and civil

⁴¹ "As I have said so often – argues Rosmini – unsatisfiable capacities are those by which individuals seek an object proportioned to some good, abstractly contemplated, which lacks an adequate object. Such capacities constitute states of absolute unhappiness. On the other hand, capacities, if determined, may or may not be satisfied. If they remain unsatisfied, individuals lack contentment, but are not necessarily unhappy as a result. The disquiet and penalty they suffer is limited, just as the capacity to which it refers is limited" (Rosmini 1994b: 396).

society [is] in a way more helpful than any other duty” (Rosmini 1994b: 342). Rosmini argues that the entire structure of labor and business collapses if the motivation to work falls outside the scope of moral contentment and ethics, and if it is based on pure subjective utility as its only principle. In that case it will be impossible to set a limit to the capitalists’ or the workers’ excessive search for profit (Rosmini 1976: 132, footnote 2). Though material benefits, regarded as an ordered “love of comforts, of well-being, of the natural means of life, can be reasonable and honest (...) as such, they can also be a labor incentive because they are attached to intelligence and virtue” (Rosmini 1977a: 107, footnote 1). Only when personal freedom comes into play, will the other incentives have a productive effect: being not only a utilitarian but also a moral activity, “labor cannot be increased – Rosmini maintains – unless it is through the development of morality” (Rosmini 1977a: 106-7).

Finally, Rosmini adheres to the concept that puts meaningful productive work and not just monetary gain as the source and final purpose of economic businesses. According to him, neither property nor property management are never justified solely in terms of monetary benefits, but always imply a relationship of responsibility between the owner or manager and the intrinsic purpose of the said property. Thus, Rosmini believes that the truly competitive worker and entrepreneur is the one who is mainly endowed with a minimum of moral values that make him trustworthy.⁴²

5. Consequences at the interpersonal level: economic rights from a personalist perspective

Rosmini’s personalist conception of the economy has also important implications at the interpersonal level. As regards individual rights in play in the market economy Rosmini’s first concern is the analysis and critique of the different forms of juridical utilitarianism and their replacement by what he considers a true conception of these same rights. For this task, he engages in a strong debate especially with Melchiorre Gioia and Giandomenico Romagnosi. However, Rosmini’s stand on this issue transcends Italy and should be understood within the wider framework of the juridical debate that took place at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century and includes the French juridical rationalism of Rousseauian and Napoleonic origin, the German juridical philosophy of authors such as Kant and Hegel, and also the English and Scottish philosophy in its individualistic (Locke, Smith), social-constructivist (Bentham) or historicist versions (Mandeville, Hume, Blackstone, Burke).

Against utilitarians, Rosmini states that neither rights in general nor economic

⁴² “Is being active enough for a man to obtain these advantages? Can they be obtained by an active man deprived of morality? What will happen if someone found out that this man does not recognize any moral obligation beyond pleasure and the calculation of self-interest?” (Rosmini 1976: 131, fn 2).

rights in particular, may be rooted in utility as a fact, this being either social or individual; instead, they should be based on that superior reason which he calls “the idea of justice.”⁴³ This idea of justice does not differ, in the last resort, from that arising from the very objective order of being, which – as we have seen – is the source not of subjective or natural necessity but of the moral obligation or necessity that transcends every finite subject.⁴⁴ In this sense, subjective utility is just the indirect consequence of respect to the objective requirements of justice:

Some of them would certainly want to tell me that justice is simple what is useful, and is nothing more than self-interest properly understood (...) Justice is a principle; utility is a consequence. While utility as a consequence is considered in its connection with the principle of justice, thought remains sound; when utility alone attracts the spirit’s attention, sophistry reigns in minds and anarchy in society (Rosmini 1993a: n. 9-10).

Now, founding economic rights on the idea of justice does not mean suppressing the idea of utility. Rosmini tries to avoid both a simple legal consecration of utility and an abstract and anti-economic legalism. In this sense, although he believes that economic rights rest on the idea of justice, he also thinks that they do not constitute themselves as such unless the idea of justice is connected to some subjective utility. Therefore, he writes, “the word ‘right’ defines ‘a faculty which human beings have for doing or experiencing anything useful’” (Rosmini 1993a: n. 29). However, this utility always implies an “eudemonological good,” that is, not any subjective good but a “human good”. In this sense, “rights pertain, properly speaking, to eudemonology” (Rosmini 1993a: n. 29). On the other hand, in his opinion, “right is not simply a mere eudemonological faculty. The faculty could never be called ‘right’ unless it were protected and defended by the moral law (...) Consequently the protection afforded by the moral law is properly speaking the form by which the merely eudemonological by nature takes on juridical dignity.” (Rosmini 1993a: n. 29) Rosmini then concludes that “right consists in a ‘eudemonological faculty protected by the moral law’” (Rosmini 1993a: n. 53).

Besides, this conception of economic rights implies that they must always be the result of the personal activity of the rights’ holder. In effect, Rosmini argues that there can be no rights as a result of merely material or physical activities. For a right to exist, the subject of right must be a person, endowed with intelligence and free will. Thus, Rosmini thinks it is not possible to speak of rights in the case of animals (Rosmini 1993a: n. 242). In this point, we can also notice the marked differences between Rosmini and the sensist-utilitarian conception of rights upon

⁴³ “In applying these considerations to positive laws, I became convinced that the most simple, basic, and therefore most noble idea is the idea of justice. All solid attempts at reasoning about positive laws must begin here. Ever other value possessed by positive law appeared accidental, accessory and derivative; the essence of the perfection of laws consisted in justice alone (...)” (Rosmini 1993a: n. 8).

⁴⁴ “These obligations arise (...) from the law as their first source. Rights are such only in relation to the moral law” (Rosmini 1993b: n. 415, fn 128).

the basis of purely material acts or faculties, understood as mere forces (Rosmini 1993a: n. 243). Unless those acts are related to the free and personal principle ruling all human nature, they cannot constitute a right. Therefore, although right may be accompanied by a material force that defends it (juridical or political coercion), in Rosmini's view, it is in itself a moral entity that springs from the relationship between personal freedom and moral law and consequently it is the opposite of a force (Rosmini 1993a: n. 224). Indeed, the right over a faculty or good arises from a type of relationship with the personal principle which Rosmini will call "ownership." In his words, "ownership" should not be understood in the sense of external or economic ownership alone, but in the sense of any union of the free personal principle with a faculty, activity or good, so that it becomes of the subject's own, that is to say, "forms part of his ownership by natural law." Upon the basis of all the aforementioned elements, which make up "the essence of right" (Rosmini 1993a: n. 318), Rosmini will establish the rules to follow when "applying the notion of right to different human activities in order to verify which activities acquire the moral dignity that makes them rights." (Rosmini 1993a: n. 321) Thus, in order to determine if an economic activity is a right, it is necessary to determine it "as pertaining to and subordinated to person, that is, as something proper to person" (Rosmini 1993b: n. 60).

Having considered all these principles, we may now see more accurately how they apply, according to Rosmini, to the juridical dimension of an economy. Rosmini believes that the main joint articulating the juridical dimension of an economy is the right of ownership. Indeed, on the one hand, he makes the criticism of individualist utilitarians, who – in his view – tend to conceive the right of ownership as "a force" "regulated by reason, in such a way that reason directs the operator to obtain maximum satisfaction" (Rosmini 1993b: n. 347) or as an utility, in such a way that our dominion extends to "all that reason finds to be an opportune means for reaching this end" (Rosmini 1993b: n. 414). To him, the mistake made by individualist utilitarians is that of founding the right of ownership on the fact of pure utility, occupancy or labor of a subjective nature, without any relationship whatsoever with personal and moral relations to others. Social utilitarians, on their part, make the mistake of founding property on the abstract idea of objective utility, need or merit, collectively determined and without any relationship with each person's subjective dimension.⁴⁵ In spite of

⁴⁵ Rosmini criticizes the theses by authors such as Blackstone, Bentham, Kant or Genovesi, who maintain that the right of ownership is based either on reciprocity, social consensus or on a force of social coercion applied with a view to some kind of "social utility." In any case, these authors have in common the fact that they "do not recognize rights to ownership outside civil society." (Rosmini 1993b: n. 351) Rosmini also rejects the solutions to the question of ownership provided by "Saint-Simonians, Chartists, Communists" and other socialists, who found the right of ownership on "arithmetic equality, merit or need". (Rosmini 1993b: n. 430) Rosmini criticizes the purely ideological conception of ownership of these "ultra radicals", which fully ignores its historical and factual dimension, because "presupposing that for a thing to be mine, it is sufficient that I judge on the basis of certain speculative reasons that it belongs to me" would imply that "I do not need to take possession of it, nor is it relevant that others have already done so." (Rosmini 1993b: n. 431)

their divergence in this respect, both conceptions agree in detaching the right of ownership from the unity of person's physical, spiritual, eudemological and moral elements which, as we have seen, grant said right its juridical nature.⁴⁶ Therefore this relationship will be threefold: "physical," "intellectual" and "moral." In a word, the right of ownership is neither individualistic nor socialist: it is personal, interpersonal and social at the same time.⁴⁷

The second axis of the interpersonal dimension of economy is built on the right of free competition, that is to say, on the right of using one's personal capabilities to obtain the benefits of the market, developed through intelligent and laborious efforts:

No one can prevent another person –writes Rosmini– from earning except by occupying beforehand, through competition, what the other would have earned. Such pre-occupancy, as we call it, comes about through expeditious effort and greater industry. To limit, by an act of will alone, other's freedom to earn and in general their freedom to acquire some other good or occupancy, is an infringement of Right even if the limitation is supported with force. A private individual could not do this; the government, therefore, cannot do it in favor of an individual. Generally speaking freedom of trade is founded in natural Right and is therefore inviolable (Rosmini 1993b: n. 1676).

In fact, the dynamics of personal economic development presupposes not only the possibility of ownership over things. In fact, it is also by virtue of freedom that we can make ownership productive by means of acts of actual occupancy of the goods, which imply labor capacity to derive profit from what is owned. Without economic freedom, the right of ownership turns ownership into something sterile.⁴⁸ The exercise of the right of economic freedom is thus the act that allows us to develop our capacities and makes the right of ownership possible:

⁴⁶ Being Rosmini's conception of the human being not individualistic but personalist, for him the right of ownership can never be that of "the isolated individual who appropriates things without regard for his fellow human beings," but of the person who "coexists with other human beings to whom he is related through his intelligence and moral status." (Rosmini 1993b: n. 879) In this way, the right of ownership as subordinated to the idea of justice and to objective moral law, implies, from its origin, transcendence with regard to the subject of right and includes others: "When [he] makes things his own, therefore, he has to take others into consideration. Mere caprice can no longer provide a good foundation for the right of ownership" (Rosmini 1993b: n. 879).

⁴⁷ In Rosmini's words, the concept of ownership "shares in the very characteristics of person." Such characteristics are "exclusiveness," "perpetuity," "unity," "simplicity" and "unlimitedness." (Rosmini 1993b: n. 946-952) Now, Rosmini makes it clear that these characteristics belong to "ownership in fact" but not to "ownership by right." This is a fundamental distinction since, precisely by neglecting it, many authors "maintain that the human being can do what he likes with what is his: he can abuse it, prevent others' from using it harmlessly, destroy it without any motive other than caprice, make it harmful to others and even to himself. It is certainly true that person has the physical faculty to do this (...). But this, according to me, is only the fact of ownership, not the right" (Rosmini 1993b: n. 953).

⁴⁸ "This ownership is then pervaded by freedom, because, as we said, ownership is only a kind of extra instrument acquired by persons, in order to operate according to their ends" (Rosmini 1993b: n. 302).

It is clear that by exercising our freedom we both develop our powers and create external ownership for ourselves (Rosmini 1993b: n. 302).

Whenever freedom is not sufficiently developed, there is no capacity to acquire property, the latter remaining always in the same hands. Thus, according to Rosmini, an economy very much centered on the defense of ownership but neglectful of the development of freedom tends to be static, scarcely productive, and unjustly distributed. Freedom is the dynamic element in economy that makes ownership circulate, be produced and be distributed. Thus, in Rosmini's economic philosophy, freedom is understood as a co-principle that is completed and fed-back by ownership, this allowing a just and economically productive development within economic relationships. Now, Rosmini's conception of economic freedom must be carefully analyzed to avoid inaccurate appreciations. In the same way as he distinguishes between the fact and the right of ownership, when Rosmini advocates economic freedom, he is referring not to a simple factual freedom but to what he calls "juridical freedom," that is not a simple useful freedom but a freedom based on justice.⁴⁹ Therefore, the right of economic freedom as the fundamental basis of the economy, both from the point of view of justice as of utility, does not imply the idea that economic freedom is an absolute principle:

I fully support free competition for every kind of good, provided we do not misunderstand "competition", an undetermined and equivocal word. I do not espouse competition as the sole source and principle of justice, but as the effect, not the cause of justice, that is, as the effect of justice which is anterior to and therefore determines the right of competition. If this important distinction is ignored, the meaning of the word remains uncertain and opens the field to many unfortunate sophisms (Rosmini 1994b: n. 695).

In this sense, for Rosmini, both rights of private property and economic freedom cannot be supported or opposed in the abstract or by means of pure utilitarian argumentations, but require a juridical sense that takes into account both the nature and the limits of these economic rights. However, even though both rights have – already at the level of interpersonal right – characteristics which clearly differentiate them from the individualist and socialist conceptions, at the socio-political level they will acquire further differences that I will try to present in the following pages.

6. Three main principles for economic policies: social justice, common good and distributive justice

Once Rosmini tackles the dimension of interpersonal economic relationships

⁴⁹ "The question of free trade has scarcely been considered under this aspect of justice, although it is the principal point of view from which it should be examined if indeed it is true that justice precedes every other question and interest" (Rosmini 1993b: n. 1676).

governed by ethics and natural right, he finally arrives at the crucial issue of the social and political dimension of the economy. In fact, just economic relationships do not take place solely between individual persons, but also between them and different types of social groupings (families and commercial groups, civil, political and religious organizations). Thus, according to Rosmini, society also has its own rights, which are as inviolate as those of individuals.⁵⁰ In that sense, Rosmini introduces the principle of “social justice” which is, according to him, the first end that the government of “civil society”⁵¹ has to take into account while dealing with economic issues.⁵² Social justice is, in Rosmini’s view, essentially different from other forms of justice since it is “that part of justice which binds individuals and joins them in society” (Rosmini 1993a: n. 26). By virtue of this trait, social justice goes beyond that which would suffice, for example, for commutative justice amongst persons, where the juridical nature of the relationship is exclusively determined by mutual respect for the rights of each individual. Although social justice certainly includes the latter, its specific end must seek the coordination of rights with a view to their maximum potentiating and enlargement according to what political prudence may prescribe for each society at a concrete time and place.

When we say that the natural constitution of civil society must be deduced from social justice, we are not referring to any kind of justice, but to justice applied to the determination of the forms and laws of society (Rosmini 1887: 669).

However, although social justice implies that society has its rights (Rosmini calls them “social rights”), which must be respected by the individual, these rights can never reach the point of being maintained at the cost of the rights of the individual (“extra-social rights”). Although this does not mean that society

⁵⁰ “In relationship to right, a collective body is only a juridical person equal to any other individual. Between the collective body and its members, and between it and all other juridical persons who are not its members, juridical relationships exist and juridical questions can arise, just as they do between individual persons.” (Rosmini 1993b: n. 1657).

⁵¹ We should remember that “civil society” is a synonym to “political society,” both in Rosmini and in most political philosophers until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

⁵² In fact, together with Luigi Taparelli D’Azeglio, Rosmini was one of the first philosophers to use the term. Certainly the notion of social justice has not in Rosmini the same specific meaning as the banner of the vindication of the rights of society’s poorest that would reach universal diffusion in the twentieth century. He rather sees social justice as society’s architectonic principle, in the same fashion as all those of the classical period – from Plato and Aristotle onwards – had used it. Rosmini states that “justice is the first element to enter the construction of every human society” since “the theory of justice is part of the theory of society and vice versa, the theory of society is, in another aspect, part of the theory of justice” (Rosmini 1993a: 26).

On Taparelli and Rosmini the reader may read the recent paper by Roberto Romani (2013). While Rosmini has a personalist view, Taparelli D’Azeglio’s philosophy is more characterized by the concept of natural law and by a deductive methodology since he is closer to Aquinas’s paradigm. This difference explains Rosmini’s originality with respect to other Catholic social traditions of the nineteenth century.

cannot, at some point, request “the sacrifice imposed upon one member at a moment of urgent, sudden need,” (Rosmini 1993b: n. 1656) however, this sacrifice of private good in favor of public good can never signify the sacrifice of private good of “a single member of the society,” but the “good of all the individual members of the society.” (Rosmini 1993b: n. 1656) Rosmini’s conception of social justice is, therefore, as far away from individualism as from socialism:

The mistake of those who exaggerate social right to the destruction of extra-social right inevitably produces absolutism; just as the mistake of those who exaggerate extra-social right to the destruction of social right inevitably produces ultra-liberalism and anarchy (Rosmini 1994b: n. 138).

Rosmini also incorporates the concept of the common good in his guidelines for economic policies. He understands it neither as an abstract and collectivized entity, nor as a mere sum or aggregation of individual preferences but as a complex combination of individual and social ends (Rosmini 1996: 1679). According to Rosmini, the common good is closely related to the question of happiness, understood in a personalist sense, as the “true human good” and the fruit of inner contentment derived from a virtuous use of material goods. Therefore public policies informed by the common good are the ones that take into account “with the increase of external goods and with the decrease of evils, the occasions on which citizens may abuse their freedom so the cost of their own misfortune and unhappiness are avoided.” (Rosmini 1887: 668) In this sense, every economic policy (which has as its specific end the search for the increase in wealth) should be governed by the principle of the relationship between such increase and the degree of virtue and happiness (*appagamento*) existing in society. In fact, the protection of this principle on the part of the government is essential not only for the ultimate end of every policy –which consists in achieving the virtue and happiness of people– but for the prosperity of the economy as well, because the latter always ends up destroying itself if it neglects its intimate relationship with ethics.⁵³ Thus, Rosmini points out the importance of the auscultation to the moral state of the people behind the quantitative data of the economy on the part of the government in order to fulfill the principle stating that “the spirit, as the seat of *appagamento*, is the aim of politics,” and also achieve a fuller economic development, since all “external development has a need for internal morality” (Rosmini 1978b: 72).

Distributive justice is, according to Rosmini, the third aim that every economic policy must keep in mind. Although this principle implies a great complexity of elements, it is possible to discover a general criterion for the distribution of goods and evils or of costs and benefits in an economy. This criterion requires, in the first place, adopting a juridical perspective of the problem and, after this,

⁵³ “Economists will tell us how to augment private and public wealth which, however, is only one element of true social prosperity. People can be wicked and unhappy even when wealth abounds. Wealth, moreover, is quite capable of destroying itself”(Rosmini 1994a: n. 7, Preface).

a political and economic perspective. The mistake of all types of utilitarianism, whether conservative, statist or liberal, has been precisely that of inverting this order of priorities.

They do not consider the distribution of responsibilities a juridical but a political or economical problem. We may well ask: "Which distribution of social responsibilities helps a government most in its administration, or makes the responsibilities felt less by the majority of the citizens, or by the most powerful citizens, so that no one complains? Which distribution is more conducive to the production of wealth?" But before all these questions, we should ask another which is certainly more humble, but much more profound, sacred and helpful to society: "Which distribution of social responsibilities is more just?" (Rosmini 1996: n. 2163).

In this sense, a juridical vision of the distributive problem implies considering, as the foundation of all just distribution, the acknowledgement of the human being as person, not as a purely passive and material being who may be the object of paternalistic protection by a feudal lord who grants gifts, by a benefactor State which turns him into an object of assistance or physical well-being, or by a market which induces needs and desires that suffocate true freedom. According to Rosmini, distributive justice begins when the laws and measures of political society allow human beings to unfold their moral and juridical freedom and, through it, achieve by themselves the economic goods they need for their development. Thus, the nucleus of distributive justice on the part of political society and, in our case, of economic policy, does not consist in distributing economic goods in a direct manner but in seeking that the greatest possible display of the moral and economic capacities of the citizens may perform this distribution for itself.

These three principles of social justice, common good and distributive justice are reached by civil society, according to Rosmini, through what he calls the "regulation of the modality of rights." This means that civil society has to produce instruments – such as institutions, laws and political actions – which enable the best possible way to "modalize" the exercise of all rights involved, both individual and social, so that these rights may be preserved and enriched. The first requisite to reach this aim is to avoid the overriding of any right with the pretext of obtaining a greater utility. Thus "the *mode* of a right can be changed without the possessor of the right losing any of his goods, his pleasures or his reasonable contentment." (Rosmini 1996: n. 1616) At the same time, the second requisite is to provide all the members of society with the greatest possible good, something which could never be obtained by the sole action of separate individuals. In that sense, according to Rosmini, public policies are many times the result of what he calls an "amalgamation of rights." In other words, some rights not only can change their form but they can be also "put in common" by the State so as to obtain common goods which the individuals could never achieve by themselves.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ "The end of civil society can also be promoted by placing some rights in common. This amalgamation of rights would seem basically to be the same as a change in the form of rights (...) because

7. Public policies from a personalist perspective

Taking into account all we have mentioned with regard to individual economic rights and social principles, the first thing we should say is that, according to Rosmini, the defense of the right of ownership should be one of the central aims of every economic policy:

Generally speaking, the defense of private ownership is always present when civil society has been constituted. If the private owner himself is incapable of defending what he owns, society itself undertakes this responsibility (Rosmini 1993b: n. 887).

In this sense, Rosmini is a harsh critic of all statist, socialist and communist systems which tend to overrule the right of ownership. To him, the development of the economy demands from the State the fullest possible protection of the exercise of the right of ownership. However, he claims that civil society evidently does not have the sole function of protecting the right of ownership; it should also prevent its limits from being wrongly expanded. In this sense, civil society should “regulate the modality” of the right of ownership without diminishing its value, with the purpose of achieving greater common good. Thus, it is clear to Rosmini that civil society has the power to “make ordinances about the ownership of individuals when the end is their own greater good” or “when the aim is the common or public good” (Rosmini 1996: n. 1667)⁵⁵.

Besides, Rosmini stands out amongst modern Catholic thinkers for his understanding and admiration of freedom of trade which he sees as the most efficient form of distribution of economic resources. According to him, it is very dangerous to attempt to replace the spontaneous order of market exchanges, seeking to artificially plan the economy. This would imply the assumption that it is possible to know the infinite motivations and reasons leading the multiple market agents to make decisions that are finally reflected in prices. As knowing such thing is impossible, the effect achieved is just the opposite: prices become distorted,

rights may be associated only if their owners suffer no harm or are compensated for all losses, either by the avoidance of a greater evil or by the acquisition of a greater good. The third function, however, is concerned with change in the form of single rights without amalgamation, while our present function concerns the placing of rights in common, in society” (Rosmini 1996: n. 2146).

⁵⁵ Rosmini mentions numerous possible ordinances referred to the regulation of the modality of the right of ownership by the political society. These include those protecting the right to the just acquisition, preservation and transfer of ownership, and those which prevent ownership’s exclusive accumulation in the hands of a few (Rosmini 2007: 55-6), as well as its unproductive possession. Rosmini even contemplates the possibility of expropriation in case public good or common good demands so, as long as due compensation is awarded: “All properties are inviolable. Forced expropriation is not violation of property when a legally ascertained public good demands it, and through a fair indemnity which conforms to the laws” (Rosmini 2007: 13). Furthermore, there is also the extreme case of forced confiscation by the State, when the conditions required by every right of ownership have disappeared. In this sense, the role of the civil society is always that of protecting and encouraging the exercise of the right of ownership to the maximum, but always within its juridical limits and in subordination to the demands posed by the common good.

decisions are made upon the basis of an unreal situation and, consequently, the wealth the economy could have otherwise achieved decreases:

[The artificial direction of wealth in (large) markets] is, to say the least, very dangerous because it cannot be directed without knowing all the laws of its circulation, without calculating the mutual influence of the infinite number of agents related amongst themselves and the irregularities and particularities of their behavior. In this way, in the belief that one is doing something to increase wealth, one disturbs it and prevents its growth (Rosmini 1923: 137).

In his view, the utilitarian State planning of economic activities is not only counterproductive, but also unworkable in reality and of unverifiable results. Thus, Rosmini supports the principle of “not directing the general course of wealth, but only accelerating it” (Rosmini 1923: 137). The task of the government is therefore mainly to encourage “not so much this or that branch of industry in particular, but industrial activity in general” (Rosmini 1923: 138). Rosmini is also a harsh critic of economic policies based on regimes of privilege, monopolies and special subsidies (Rosmini 1993b: n. 1675). Finally, he rejects the idea of the “entrepreneurial State” because it does not regulate, but directly violates the right to free competition.⁵⁶ Consequently, to Rosmini, the State function is predominantly negative⁵⁷ and should divest itself as much as possible of commercial and industrial activities to leave them in the hands of the private sector, protecting and promoting private spontaneous undertakings (Rosmini 1994b: n. 225).

However, Rosmini’s personalism also sets limits to economic freedom. In fact, according to our author, economic freedom brings prosperity only when it is a *juridical* freedom, that is to say, a freedom within a framework of just laws and a prudential policy oriented to the common good. Thus, it is necessary, according to him, that the government consider and calculate the forces at play in society so as to find their point of equilibrium in relation with the other goods society needs. This task of prudent intervention aims at solving points of conflict with the purpose of achieving a final order. (Rosmini 1923: 177) Rosmini supports a clear subsidiary role of the State in all those economic activities private individuals cannot undertake.⁵⁸ In this sense, Rosmini believes it is fundamental

⁵⁶ “The government of a civil society must not convert into a mercantile or industrial agency. This goes directly against the purpose of its institution which is that of protecting the liberty and competitiveness of the citizens for profit and never to invade this, or enter into competition with it” (Rosmini 2007: 78).

⁵⁷ “[...] the more civil societies relinquish enterprises and leave them to private activity, which they must protect and encourage, the more closely they approach their ideal. We can safely assert that in this matter at least, greater progress in civilization is made by a government that procures more public good through the spontaneous action of individuals and of the private societies it protects, and distances itself from leadership in such enterprises” (Rosmini 1996: n. 2168).

⁵⁸ “[...] civil society has the authority to undertake of itself the useful enterprises which could not in any way be successfully attempted by individuals or private societies. This is the only case where civil society can properly undertake such enterprises without exceeding the sphere of the

to adopt specific tools to provide governments with information regarding the real situation of the economy, in order to give economy a certain framework of orientation based on a prudential judgment of facts and not on abstract principles.⁵⁹ With respect to international trade, Rosmini argues that it is, in principle, just and beneficial (Rosmini 1923: 474, fn 62). However, given the particular circumstances and concrete relationships of each country or region, he admits the possibility and usefulness of establishing restrictions to the said freedom, as long as they are provisional and for a limited period of time.⁶⁰ In this way, Rosmini places the question of free trade amongst nations in the sphere of prudence and not only of pure principles.⁶¹ However, according to Rosmini, economic policies in matters of foreign trade must be directed, above all, by principles of justice. (Rosmini 1993b: n. 1676)⁶²

Besides, Rosmini supports the need to develop specific State policies to alleviate social problems, as a complement of the other general market policies. In fact, even though he believes that economic growth regulated by an economic policy oriented towards the common good and distributive justice may gradually tend to improve the condition of the poor through an increasingly better distribution of property and the unfolding of the means and capabilities necessary to acquire it, he is also aware that this process does not occur from one day to the next (Rosmini 1994a: n. 35, App. 1). In this way, the government must take measures against “the serious evils inevitably associated with inequality. The first of these

modality of rights. In doing so, it is not removing or obstructing the freedom of individuals and the possibility of concurrence, that is, it is not depriving them of any valuable right” (Rosmini 1996: n. 2169). Contrary to authors such as Adam Smith, who only agree on the existence of State-owned enterprises when the activity to be performed is by nature impracticable by private individuals, Rosmini widens the field of possible public undertakings: “A hope that individuals and private societies undertake certain useful enterprises may be vain, not because the nature of said enterprises makes said undertaking impossible, but because individuals and private societies do not attain the level of ideas, ability and activity necessary for these enterprises. If this is true, civil society (the government) will take care to increase in the citizens the abilities they still lack. It can provisionally initiate some private enterprises, for example, provided they cede them as soon as should themselves be ready to undertake them.” (Rosmini 1996: n. 2170)

⁵⁹ “The very end of statistics is the improvement of human society through a government” (Rosmini 1978b: 74) and by means of them it is possible “to foresee future needs and prepare in time for the evils which unexpectedly occur to nations” (Rosmini 1978b: 76).

⁶⁰ “I have no hesitation in accepting the opinion of those who maintain that customs and other curbs of this kind can be advantageous for the special regions for which they are established, provided they are moderate and used for exceptional cases – in other words, they are simply provisional, temporary laws” (Rosmini 1993b: n. 1676).

⁶¹ “The question of curbs placed on trade is in many ways more difficult. If the government decides to impose curbs for the sake of public utility, it will be the responsibility primarily of political economy to whether such utility will result from the particular fact in question” (Rosmini 1993b: n. 1676).

⁶² “Are such curbs fair in relationship to other peoples even when it is agreed that they are harmful to mankind as a whole? Are they just relative to all the individuals of the society for which they are established when the immediate advantage of such provisions is enjoyed only by certain determinate classes of persons, owners, traders or manufacturers?” (Rosmini 1993b: n. 1676).

is the extreme misery found at the lower end of the social scale.” Therefore, to him, the obligation to “care of poor families by society” – a subject which, in his opinion, “has still not been considered sufficiently” – should also be part of distributive justice (Rosmini 1996: n. 2630). Besides, Rosmini believes that the government must take measures that seek the distribution of goods according to existing capacities, as well as measures aimed at the distribution and promotion of capacities not yet developed, especially in the case of less favored citizens.⁶³ In addition, Rosmini opens an interesting and keen debate that anticipates in many years the problems around the modern Welfare State. The challenge is, in Rosmini’s opinion, to find the way in which the State can prudently assist the poor without overstepping its limits as regulator of the modality of rights and without destroying the spontaneous nature of acts of beneficence (Rosmini 2007: 272).

Finally Rosmini makes an extensive analysis concerning taxes, which would certainly deserve a separate study. The many pages which Rosmini devotes to the tax question show that, in his opinion, the tax policy is one of the most important tools the State has to influence the economy, both in its productive and competitive dimension and in its distributive aspect.⁶⁴ The tax scheme somehow becomes the backbone of all the other economic policies since all the principles governing said policies will come into action according to the way in which the nature, applicability, distribution and collection of taxes are conceived. In that sense, in Rosmini’s opinion, taxes have an economic dimension but also a juridical dimension (Rosmini 1996: n. 2163) from whence “distributive justice and public utility are the two principles which should regulate taxes” (Rosmini 1923: 325). Rosmini maintains that the right of society can never imply an absolute or arbitrary dominion. On the contrary, the government is “simply the collector and administrator of the common *contributions* for the end of society” (Rosmini 1996: n. 2160). Rosmini thus rejects a paternalistic or feudal conception of taxes that sees them as a forced extraction of funds on the part of a lord from his vassals, as well as a statist conception that considers them as a simple means of financing an omnipresent State, with no other limit than the unrestricted needs of expenses it may wish to establish upon the basis of an “egalitarian” estimate of alleged social utility.⁶⁵ Furthermore, Rosmini also rejects a completely liberal

⁶³ “This kind of politics really wants to increase in the lower class knowledge of their own interests and the resolve to apply themselves to these interests with foresight and activity” (Rosmini 1994b: n. 693).

⁶⁴ According to Rosmini, taxes should always stay within two fundamental limits, as follows: “1) the contributions must not exceed the need of the social end, and 2) they must be equally distributed in proportion to the citizens’ abilities” (Rosmini 1996: n. 2160).

⁶⁵ According to Rosmini, in order for a tax to be just, it should be paid by whom benefits from it, which implies avoiding the error of “unduly making some citizens pay a tax from which they will never benefit” or “making all pay for a few” (Rosmini 1923: 329). Besides, people should be aware of the benefit a certain tax means to them and there should also exist an assumed willingness on their part to finance such benefit through their contribution (Rosmini 1923: 326-7). In this sense, Rosmini closely links the payment of taxes to people’s knowledge and free decision to form part of society and also to afford the cost of maintaining it.

position, as for him taxes are not simply inevitable evils that should disturb the operation of the markets as little as possible, but a formidable means of juridical-economic regulation in order to attain a significant portion of the common good and distributive justice in an economy.⁶⁶

Conclusions

A first conclusion about this article has to do with Rosmini's project for new economic thought. From the beginning of my research I was surprised by the observations of many authors about Rosmini's deep and thorough knowledge of economic science. However, at the same time, I found out that none of them, except in some way Pietro Piovani, had attempted a general and systematic reconstruction of Rosmini's economic thought. In most of the scholars the references to this thought are fragmentary or oriented to other purposes. In that sense, this article tries to reflect the main outlines of this ambitious project of reconstruction of Rosmini's economic thought that I tried to achieve in a more systematic way elsewhere (Hoevel, 2013).

Secondly, from the methodological point of view, I was mainly moved by Piero Barucci's (1977) and Giorgio Campanini's (1983: 99) remarks about the need for a reconstruction of Rosmini's economic culture. In that sense, I tried to discover the specific micro-context of Rosmini's economic readings on which he based his project of elaborating an alternative proposal for the new fundamentals of economic thought. This was very important in order to elaborate my main historical argument, which is that Rosmini assimilates many elements of the classical economic school in the context of the tradition of the Italian economists as well as in function of his own alternative conception of the economy and society against the widespread utilitarian paradigm both in Italy and Europe.

Thirdly, the study of Rosmini's economic culture also allowed me to reach a clearer understanding of Rosmini's theoretical approach and main purpose behind his economic ideas. In my opinion, this is neither a critique of socialism or statism nor the defense of classical liberalism, as many authors argue, but the need for a thorough and comprehensive critique of the utilitarian assumptions underlying economic science and the idea of replacing them with a new personalist philosophy. Indeed, for Rosmini, economic science's central problem is the

⁶⁶ Rosmini suggests straining the eye from the economic viewpoint, so that taxes are not anti-productive, but encourage investment and the creation of wealth in the private sector while providing sufficient funds for public expenses. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to evaluate as accurately as possible the consequences of the imposition of a certain tax on each economic activity, taking into account the costs, possible profits, and characteristics of each market at a certain time and place (Rosmini 1923: 322-4). Therefore, they "should be as moderate as possible", and attempts should be made at finding a point of equilibrium with the purpose of establishing "the maximum possible decrease in taxes" so that production growth is encouraged and the "State revenues do not drop but increase" (Rosmini 1923: 325).

subjectivist conception of human nature and the utilitarian conception of human action which reduces economic value to subjective satisfaction. Besides, this subjectivist (individualistic or socialist) conception is ultimately self-defeating for the same economic science. Therefore, based on a systematic research of many different Rosminian texts, I tried to demonstrate the existence in Rosmini's thought of a new approach to economic thought that I called "personalist". Based on the anthropological theses of objective knowledge, freedom and contentment (*appagamento*), I tried to show how Rosmini overcame the reduction of economic activities to subjective incentives and required the recognition by the economic agent of the objective dimension of economic goods. In this regard, I also tried to illustrate the microeconomic consequences of this personalist approach in basic economic activities such as consumption and work.

Fourthly, Rosmini's economic philosophy also contained a valuable critique of juridical utilitarianism and behind it a new proposal to address the relationship between law and economics. In this aspect, I tried to show the way in which Rosmini established economic rights based on an objective idea of justice, far away both from juridical historicism and legal rationalism. Based on the natural law tradition reinterpreted in a personalist and historical key, Rosmini asserted the existence of some natural economic rights (especially the right of ownership and the right of economic freedom) but did not favor a rationalist conception of natural law conceiving these rights as absolute realities emanating from an individual or an abstract society completely independent of historical evolution. In fact, the relationship between economics and law is contained in what Rosmini calls "rational law," which combines legal reasoning based on absolute metaphysical and ethical principles with historical and pragmatic evolution. This perspective permeates his conception of individual economic rights which allowed Rosmini to go beyond the rationalism present in French statism and the legal historicism that can be found in Anglo-Scottish liberalism.

Finally, my fifth conclusion has to do with Rosmini's conception of economic policies. Based on the application of the principles of social justice, the common good and distributive justice, Rosmini tries to overcome the concept of a State whose excessive interventionism distorts market mechanisms and that may be the first step of a totalitarian social constructivism. Besides, he is also far away from the political romanticism or neo-corporatism that characterizes a certain tradition of Catholic social thought. Finally, his economic liberalism is very different from other forms of economic liberalism that conceive market freedom as an absolute principle that solves by itself all the problems of the economy. Indeed, Rosmini's originality in this matter is to have combined a defense of liberal rights of private property and economic freedom with a precise look to their ethical, juridical and political limits and to have established a set of criteria on the ways these rights should be exercised under different historical, social and cultural circumstances. In that sense, it could be said that Rosmini supports what could be called an ethical or personalist version of a very moderate economic liberalism.

Rosmini was perhaps the first Catholic thinker of the modern era who tried to assimilate the best elements of economic science and combine them with his personalist philosophy. Criticizing many of the teachings of modern economic thought, but also accepting many of its insights, he was also a clear predecessor of a series of other Christian economic thinkers of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century.⁶⁷ However, the relevance of Rosmini's economic and social personalism is not merely historical, but closely related with the perplexities in relation to our times. Interpreting current economic problems under the light of Rosmini's economic philosophy can be therefore a very effective hermeneutic method both for the understanding of the contemporary cultural debate on economics and for the practical design of economic institutions and policies in order to orient the global market economy to a more human and useful end.

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⁶⁷ Marco Minghetti and Luigi Sturzo are perhaps the two economic thinkers most influenced by Rosmini. Although not influenced directly by our author, it is possible to see a similar kind of personalist and moderate liberalism in an author like Wilhelm Röpke, one of the founders of German Ordo liberalism.

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an accessible introduction to Antonio Rosmini's economic thought showing its amplitude and connection to the history of economic ideas. The article presents, in the first place, a general view of Rosmini's economic ideas and main works in the context of his biographical and intellectual itinerary. In the second place, it shows how Rosmini's economic thought is deeply influenced by the economic thought of his times, represented especially by the classical economists, Italian civil economists and other economic thinkers such as Ludwig von Haller, Simonde de Sismondi and the utopian socialists. In the third place, the article presents two different interpretations of Rosmini's economic philosophy and proposes a third one based on the thesis of Rosmini's having the project of replacing the utilitarian bases of economic thinking by a personalist conception of human and economic action. Finally, the article tries to show the reader the relevance of Rosmini's economic conception, social principles and public policies' proposals in relation to the contemporary economic debate.

Jel Classification: B10, B31, B40.

Keywords: Antonio Rosmini, economic thought, utilitarianism, personalism, public policies.