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INTRODUCTION



Immanent Critique of Capitalism as a Form of Life: On Rahel Jaeggi's Critical Theory

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An immanent critique of capitalism as a form of life: this is one of the crucial points of the new critical theory proposed by Rahel Jaeggi, and it is to this conceptual point, which includes various themes, that the present special issue of *Critical Horizons* is mainly devoted.

It is a research programme in which we can see the originality of the theoretical operation thanks to which Jaeggi aims to renew the German tradition of critical theory. The proposed framework is characterized on the one hand by the adoption of new and updated conceptual tools, both in terms of themes and methodology: first of all because of the concept of a form of life and its social-ontological meaning. On the other hand, this framework is firmly placed in the path of German critical theory: it resumes some of the salient points and perspectives of this tradition starting with the *Kapitalismuskritik* and the immanent methodology of critique. This dual nature makes the new programme open and innovative, and at the same time consistent with a well-established research tradition.

More closely, the theoretical project of an immanent critique of capitalism as a form of life assimilates and relaunches Axel Honneth's teaching, starting from the general point of view of the Hegelian turn which Honneth has tried to give to critical theory in recent decades. Jaeggi, in fact, accords an important role to the Hegelian perspective, first of all because she puts "immanent critique" at the centre of her conceptual framework. This is a methodology that, unlike Honneth's "reconstructive" approach, has been configured on the model of a Marxian critique of ideology, and in particular from the interpretation that Adorno gave of this *Ideologiekritik*; emblematic in this sense is Jaeggi's 2005 article, *Kein Einzelner vermag etwas dagegen: Adornos Minima Moralia als Kritik von Lebensformen*.¹ It is from this perspective that the model of immanent critique has been presented by Jaeggi in the current context of the debate on the forms of social critique, as appears in a clearer and more systematic way in "What Is the Critique of Ideology?"²

Jaeggi's immanentism furthermore shows a strong affinity with the traditional perspective of Left Hegelianism and to its relaunch by the first generation of the so-called "Frankfurt School" (stronger than with Honneth). At the same time, the update of the immanent critique of capitalism discloses – at the conceptual-methodological level – a clear inclination toward the current interest in social ontology, which also draws from the tradition

of American pragmatism (as in recent critical theory), and which is based (also) on an original interpretation of the concept of forms of life (*Lebensformen*). The early programme of Max Horkheimer, aimed at developing a wide-ranging critique of contemporary capitalist society, is then re-thought also in terms of a new form of normativity that has to remain anchored in social analysis and critique. In this sense, we have to distinguish between the “normativity” linked to a critical approach, and the “normativism” of the Rawlsian tradition.³

Referring again to Horkheimer, Jaeggi ups the (already high) theoretical ante concerning the task of critique: economy must be analysed in a systematic way. In so doing she radicalizes Honneth’s methodological approach, which is an alternative to Habermas’s dichotomy between life-world and economic system: it is now necessary to consider the ethical and normative structures that are inherent in the economy. This is the theoretical ground of the project of analysis of economics to be developed in terms of social practices that Jaeggi has proposed in essays such *What (If Anything) Is Wrong with Capitalism?*, and *A Wide Concept of Economy: Economy as a Social Practice and the Critique of Capitalism*; two essays that are at the centre of many discussions in this special issue, together with *Towards an Immanent Critique of Forms of Life* and the monograph *Critique of Forms of Life*.⁴ It is in these essays that the critique of capitalism becomes a critique of the capitalistic form of life. At the same time, Jaeggi undertakes the task of relaunching and updating Marx’s heritage on two converging levels: on the side of immanent critique, a level that proceeds from the model of *Ideologiekritik*; and on the side of (a more classic) critique of exploitation, and more generally of a normative critique of capitalist economy in a wide sense.

In short, this special issue offers some considerations above all of Jaeggi’s programme aimed at developing the key features of an immanent critique of capitalism as a form of life – rather than on topics like alienation, solidarity or progress. More particularly, at the heart of our critical discussions there are five basic theoretical elements to this research programme: immanent critique, the critique of ideology, the critique of capitalism, the concept of form of life, and the economy in a wide sense. In so doing, in the pages of *Critical Horizons* we have continued the critical discussion started in a workshop held at the University of Parma in 2017, which started from five of Jaeggi’s essays devoted to these five topics, collected by Marco Solinas in a book entitled *Forms of Life and Capitalism*.⁵

This special issue includes seven essays that analyse Jaeggi’s philosophical position and is followed by her reply to the objections raised in the discussion by the contributed papers. Jaeggi’s notion of immanent critique is first analytically reconstructed and situated within contemporary social theory by the contributions offered by Giorgio Fazio and Marco Solinas. In his paper “Situating Rahel Jaeggi in the Contemporary Frankfurt Critical Theory”, Giorgio Fazio compares Jaeggi’s approach to immanent critique to the critical theory of Axel Honneth’s, which is the closer antecedent and point of reference of her work. Fazio underlies the originality of Jaeggi’s re-appropriation of Honneth’s position, which would allow her to overcome the risks involved by Honneth’s historical teleologism and ethical substantialism. On the other hand, Fazio argues that Jaeggi’s negativist understanding of immanent critique is exposed to a contrary risk, consisting in an excess of formalism and proceduralism, which detaches her model from the praxis of emancipation rooted in concrete social struggles: This is further deployed in “The Political Deficit of Neo-Hegelian Immanent Critique” is then further deployed by Marco Solinas, whose

paper addresses Jaeggi's enterprise from the vantage point of a comparison of her neo-Hegelian notion of immanent critique to Michael Walzer's "internal critique". According to Solinas, Jaeggi's objections to Walzer, while following Honneth's misleading interpretation of Walzer's distinction between internal and external critique, ends up being rather unilateral, because they are mainly focused on the epistemic question of the standard of social critique and of its justification. This would lead Jaeggi to neglect the political task of Walzer's criticism "from within", which constitutively involves the internal positioning of the critic in relation to social and political struggles. The same political deficit is to be found in Jaeggi's re-appropriation of Marx's critique of ideology, which is contrasted by Solinas with Walzer's reading of Gramsci's notion of the struggle for hegemony.

The relation between immanent critique, Jaeggi's account of *Lebensform*, and her critique of capitalism, is then analysed by Alessandro Pinzani and Federica Gregoratto. In "Critique of Forms of Life or Critique of Pervasive Doctrines?", Alessandro Pinzani argues that, in order to be able to provide a criticism of neo-liberalism, Jaeggi's notion of form of life should be complemented with the notion of "pervasive doctrine", understood as a coherent set of beliefs and values, as well as a set of norms and social practices organized around them. According to Pinzani, the notion of pervasive doctrines would allow us to criticize neo-liberalism insofar as it provokes systemic suffering rooted in social structures and power relations, and not just, as Jaeggi suggests, because of its alleged irrationality or lack of success. Federica Gregoratto's paper on "Capitalism and the Nature of Life-forms" investigates the ontological presuppositions of the notion of "form of life" adopted by Jaeggi as the main framework needed for problematizing capitalism as a social whole rather than as a mere economic system. According to Gregoratto, Jaeggi's critical analysis of the immanent flaws of capitalism is weakened by her reduction of life-form to something merely cultural. Gregoratto argues that a more dialectical and dynamic understanding of the tension between *form* and *life* could here be offered by a Deweyan ontological and naturalist framework, which could better account for some aspects of ecological crises within capitalism understood as a transactional form of life.

The socio-ontological presuppositions of Jaeggi's notion of form of life, and the account of normativity that they involve, are then addressed by Italo Testa, Leonardo Marchettoni, and Matteo Bianchin, whose papers critically analyse Jaeggi's model in light of socio-ontological notions developed by John Searle, David Lewis, and Sally Haslanger. In "How are Bundles of Social Practices Constituted?" Italo Testa shows that Jaeggi's two-sided socio-ontological account of forms of life involves an intimate tension. On the one hand, forms of life are understood as inert bundles of practices constituted through habituation. On the other hand, they are understood, following Rawls and Searle's constitutive rules, in terms of constitution through norms. Testa argues that in the end the normative approach prevails and leads to some sort of normative essentialism which cannot be justified by the arguments offered by Jaeggi. Jaeggi's understanding of social practices is also analysed by Leonardo Marchettoni. In "Practices, Conventions, Problems", Marchettoni argues that Jaeggi's project of immanent critique of forms of life does not succeed in differentiating the normative structure of social practices from Lewisian social conventions. While trying to avoid appealing to external normative sources, Jaeggi understands the transformations of social practices as the result of episodes of crises triggered by their inability to cope with second-order problems. Here Marchettoni argues that the resolution of second-order problems again involves some conventional aspects, and that this hinders

Jaeggi's project of normative immanent critique. Finally, in "Ideology, Critique, and Social Structures" Matteo Bianchin reconstructs Jaeggi's understanding of immanent critique of ideology as having both an explanatory and a normative task. By using Sally Haslanger's notion of "social structural explanations", Bianchin unpacks the social, functional, and genetic demands of such explanations. He then argues that in the critique of ideology these aspects are intertwined with a normative dimension. According to Bianchin, the latter seems to involve some truths about social cooperation which are not just historical truths, as Jaeggi seems to think, nor are they transcendent truths, but are rather rooted in psychological facts concerning the infrastructure of social cooperation, and whose normative dimension would be analogous to a theory of justice.

Notes

1. Jaeggi, R. "Kein Einzelner vermag etwas dagegen: Adornos Minima Moralia als Kritik von Lebensformen." In *Dialektik der Freiheit*, edited by A. Honneth, 115–141. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005.
2. "Was ist Ideologiekritik?", In *Was ist Kritik?*, edited by R. Jaeggi, and T. Wesche, 266–298. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009.
3. See in this sense Jaeggi, R., and R. Celikates. *Sozialphilosophie*. Eine Einführung. Munich: Beck, 2016.
4. Jaeggi, R. "What (if Anything) is Wrong with Capitalism? Dysfunctionality, Exploitation and Alienation: Three Approaches to the Critique of Capitalism." *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 54 (S1), 2015; Jaeggi, R. "A Wide Concept of Economy: Economy as a Social Practice and the Critique of Capitalism." In *Critical Theory in Critical Times*, edited by P. Deutscher, and C. Lafont, 160–179. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018; Jaeggi, R. "Towards an Immanent Critique of Forms of Life." *Raisons politiques. Revue de théorie politique*, n. 57 (2015): 13–29; Jaeggi, R. *Critique of Forms of Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018.
5. *Forms of Life and Capitalism. A One Day Workshop with Rahel Jaeggi*, University of Parma, 20 February 2017, organized by Italo Testa and Marco Solinas, with the support of the "Fondazione per la Critica Sociale"; the cited book is: Jaeggi, R. *Forme di vita e capitalismo*. Edited, introduced and translated by Marco Solinas. Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2016.

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(Mimesis, 2010), *Teorie dell'argomentazione* (Bruno Mondadori, 2006), *Ragione impura* (Bruno Mondadori, 2006), *Hegel critico e scettico* (Padova 2002). He has edited *I that is We, and We that is I. Perspectives on Contemporary Hegel* (Brill, 2016), a collection of essays of Th.W. Adorno, *La crisi dell'individuo* (Diabasis, 2010), and is the editor of *Habits. Pragmatist Approaches from Cognitive Neurosciences to Social Sciences*, in preparation by Cambridge University Press. His articles on social and political philosophy have appeared on *Constellations, Philosophy and Social Criticism, Critical Horizons, International Journal of Philosophical Studies, European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*.