

## *Foreword* Creation beyond Measure

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Negri's interpretation of the book of Job turns on an analogy between justice and economic value. Both are supported, he contends, by theories of measure and equivalence, and in both realms the theory of measure is in crisis. To follow Negri's reasoning the reader must tack back and forth not only between legal and economic arguments but also between the ancient scene of the narrative and contemporary capitalist society. The result is a complex text in which many paths are woven together. I want to navigate one of these possible routes to explore how, once the mechanisms of measure and equivalence no longer function, value can be conceived on the basis of human creativity.

By posing the problematic of justice in the book of Job in terms of measure, Negri does not stray far from the text and its conventional interpretations. Justice is conceived by Job and his interlocutors primarily according to a logic of retribution, which rests on a calculus that equates crimes with punishments and virtues with rewards. Job's initial complaints emphasize that his sufferings are unjust because he has done nothing to deserve them. His three interlocutors—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—all maintain, in one way or another, that divine justice and its system of measure are intact, perhaps based on a calculation or information that is beyond human understanding. Job instead insists that the theory of measure has been violated: no equation can justify his suffering in terms of his actions. In any case, by focusing on the centrality of measure and equivalence as the

bases for justice, Negri engages with some of the standard themes in the interpretation of Job's travails.<sup>1</sup>

Negri does depart from conventional interpretations when he proposes an analogy between the injustice Job suffers and the position of labor in contemporary capitalist production. The correspondence rests on the notion that the relationship between labor and economic value is determined by a theory of measure and equivalence. This requires some explanation for those not familiar with Marxist theory. The so-called labor theory of value posits that in capitalist society the value of a commodity (although not necessarily its price) is proportional to the quantity of labor required on average for its production. The early nineteenth-century political economist David Ricardo is often considered the originator of the theory, but Karl Marx develops it in the opening chapters of *Capital* and it has been the subject of a long history of debate. Marx uses the quantitative measures of this theory—focusing especially on the value of labor-power, which is a special commodity—in order to reveal that in capitalist production labor is not paid the equivalent of the value it produces. Surplus value is precisely the difference between the value paid to the worker and the value the worker's labor contributes to the commodity produced. The labor theory of value thus allows Marx to give a quantitative definition of surplus value (and thus exploitation) as well as demonstrating how the capitalist ideology of equal exchange is a mystification that hides systematic unequal exchanges. Just as Job's suffering demonstrates a violation of the theory of justice based on equivalence, then, so too the exploitation of the worker and the capitalist expropriation of surplus value violate the notion of an equal exchange of value between worker and capitalist.<sup>2</sup>

Based on Negri's analogy between the injustices to Job and the capitalist

1 Negri undoubtedly identifies with Job's unjust suffering, at least in part. As he explains in the preface to the 2002 edition (reprinted here), Negri conceived of this book when he was being held in preventive detention in Italian prisons from 1979 to 1983 in relation to his political activities. On Negri's imprisonment and legal case, see Timothy Murphy, "Editor's Introduction," in Negri, *Books for Burning* (London: Verso, 2005), ix–xxviii.

2 For a classic presentation of the labor theory of value in Marxist theory, see Paul Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1942), 41–71.

exploitation of workers, one could easily construct a socialist interpretation that focuses on the violation and possible restitution of the theories of measure and equivalence. Such a reading would likely highlight the pro-coda to the text in chapter 42, in which God validates Job's complaint and punishes his three interlocutors for speaking falsely. God restores the fortunes of Job, resurrecting his dead family members and giving him twice as much wealth and possessions as he lost. The justice of measure is reestablished. If we shift back to the economic realm, the corresponding resolution could be conceived as a socialism of equal measure and equivalence, which has, in fact, animated the dreams of certain streams of Marxist theory. For economic justice to be established, according to this view, values have to be exchanged for their equivalents and, specifically, labor must be paid the quantity of value it produces, thus eliminating the surplus value expropriated by the capitalist. Socialism conceived in this way takes the form of a rationalized capitalism, a just capitalism, a capitalism without capitalists, which makes good on the capitalist ideology of equal exchanges and restores the integrity of measure.

Negri, however, does not pursue such a socialist interpretation. "Socialism," he writes, after reading Zophar's defense of divine justice, "is the apologia for a retributive theory of justice, human action, and social rewards" (36). Negri's interpretation, in fact, discounts the coda to the text, which restores divine order and measure, and focuses instead on Job's suffering and complaints. Job himself, Negri argues, mocks the claims that any just system of measure exists or could be restored. In Job's sarcastic reply to Zophar, for example, Negri situates Job as already "beyond Stakhanov." A Soviet miner who was heralded as a hero of socialist labor, Alexey Stakhanov is a symbol for the illusory promise of a society of labor based on just measure and equivalence. Negri reads Job's suffering not as a violation of the theory of measure, which could be restored, but rather as a symptom of the impossibility of measure and the exhaustion of the mechanisms of equivalence.

Since the 1970s Negri has argued, against most streams of Marxism, that the labor theory of value is in crisis. Capital can no longer measure and quantify value in relation to labor. Ricardo and Marx theorized the

labor theory of value in the context of manufacturing and large-scale industry, in which a clearly defined working day could function as a relatively stable basis for the measurement of labor-time and its correspondence to the quantity of value produced. The labor theory of value functioned in that period to the extent that factory production effectively represented in some sense economic production as a whole. In the late twentieth century, however, as the center of gravity of capitalist production moves outside the factory walls, Negri contends that the bases of measure tend to break down. Economic value is increasingly produced by forms of “social” labor that cannot be measured by the temporal schemes of the factory and its working day. More recently, in books that Negri and I have written together, we have elaborated notions of “immaterial” and “biopolitical” production to grasp together the processes that produce ideas, images, information, codes, affects, and the like. In biopolitical production, we claim that, on the one hand, the definition of the working day and the divisions between work-time and nonwork-time become increasingly unclear such that the quantity of labor cannot adequately be measured. On the other hand, the value of immaterial products such as ideas and affects cannot be quantified in the same way as the value of material commodities such as refrigerators and automobiles. In fact, entire new fields have sprung up in the discipline of accounting to try to come to terms with what accountants call intangible assets. The notion that the labor theory of value is in crisis rests, at least initially, on an empirical claim that quantifying both labor-time and the value of its products is becoming increasingly difficult, thus undermining any mechanism that would pose an equivalence between them.<sup>3</sup>

This is not the place to work through the minutiae of Marxist debates, but I should point out that many Marxists object to the claim that the theory of value is in crisis, in large part because they maintain that such a

3 On the crisis of the labor theory of value, see Negri, *Marx beyond Marx*, translated by Harry Cleaver, Michael Ryan, and Maurizio Viano (New York: Autonomedia, 1991); and, especially, Negri, “Twenty Theses on Marx” in *Marxism beyond Marxism*, edited by Saree Makdisi, Cesare Casarino, and Rebecca Karl (New York: Routledge, 1996), 149–80. See also Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 145–53.

notion undermines some of the central elements of Marxist analysis and politics. Their primary concerns are, first, that the concept of exploitation loses its force when surplus value can no longer be quantified and, second, that the fundamental claim that labor is the source of all economic value in capitalist society is nullified or at least diluted when no quantitative relation can be established. Negri, in contrast, approaches the crisis of the theory of value as a challenge to rethink the concept of exploitation and the relation between labor and value in non-quantitative terms. Workers are still exploited by capital, in other words, even when the quantity of value expropriated cannot be calculated; labor is still the source of all value even when its productivity cannot be measured. This conceptual and political challenge points us back to Job and helps us understand Negri's focus on both his suffering and his creative powers.

Before returning to Job, however, we need to articulate one more crucial consequence of the crisis of the labor theory of value. Negri links the functioning of the labor theory of value in the factory with the ability of the capitalist to manage labor in the production process. As Marx says, the capitalist provides cooperation, bringing workers together in the factory, giving them the tools to work together, and imposing on them the discipline of collective production. Negri identifies the crisis of the labor theory of value, then, with the decline of capitalists' capacity to manage labor in an era when the center of gravity of economic production moves outside the factory. In the context of immaterial or biopolitical production, the schemes of cooperation are not furnished by the capitalist but developed within the productive circuits of labor. As labor becomes more autonomous and the productive role of the capitalist declines, the capitalist expropriation of surplus value becomes an ever more pure and empty form of domination. Instead of focusing on the unequal exchanges of value, in other words, this perspective highlights the antagonism toward capitalist command. The rule of capital becomes merely and brutally a matter of power.

Now turning back to the book of Job we can see that here too Negri emphasizes the arrogance of power. When God finally responds to Job's complaints, there is no attempt to argue, as Job's three interlocutors

have done, that Job has been treated justly and that his sufferings can be equated to his wrongdoings. God speaks not of justice but only of power and hierarchy. God appears as pure command, ruling over the animals and the earth, dictating the course of the sun and the movements of the seas, as well as controlling the monstrous Behemoth and Leviathan. God is all-powerful and absolutely transcendent, whereas humans are virtually powerless.

Job regards God, according to Negri, not as judge or father or even as the source of discipline and mediation, but merely as antagonist, the locus of an empty, unjust command. There is no longer a question of measure—equating sins and punishment or virtues and rewards—that could support a conception of divine justice. But Job is not powerless, nor is he patient, as the conventional interpretations would have it. According to Negri's reading he stands before God angry, indignant, unrepentant, and rebellious.

Negri's reading relies on a rather indirect analogy between Job and workers, which rests primarily on two connections. The first emphasizes Job's suffering. Job's primary affect with regard to God's power is not fear but pain. Fear is the primary weapon of transcendent sovereign power, as Thomas Hobbes and numerous other authors throughout the history of political theory have taught us. A subject that fears is willing to give up freedom for security. The fact that Job does not react with fear even to God's display of absolute power is itself an act of insubordination. Instead of fear, Job expresses only his pain. Negri claims that, whereas fear establishes the vertical relation between subject and sovereign, pain is the foundation for horizontal relations among humans. "*Pain is a key,*" he writes, "*that opens the door to the community*" (90; orig. emph.). The common pain we share—the pain of survival, toil, and struggle—is a positive basis of sociality.

The second and more significant connection between Job and workers rests on the human powers of creativity. Negri attaches great importance to Job's statement in his final response that he now sees God with his eyes (42:5). One might read this line to mean that Job now understands God's infinite power and will thus willingly submit himself to it. Negri inter-

prets “seeing God,” on the contrary, as a sign that Job is now in a position equivalent in some sense to that of God or, even, as implying an inversion of the position of humanity with respect to the divine, specifically with regard to the powers of creation. “Job is the power of man on earth,” he writes, “social, constructive power—he is *production, collective labor that becomes value*” (83; orig. emph.). The figure of Job serves in this way as an allegory for the suffering, struggles, and ultimately the power of human labor.

Negri’s analysis moves back and forth, as we have seen, from justice to economics and from the ancient world to the contemporary, asking the reader to follow him through some fascinating correspondences that are held together by the concept of measure. In the end, however, the theories of measure and equivalence in the realms of both justice and economic value are completely left behind. Negri is not even nostalgic for them. Any effort to restore either a divine justice of retribution and reward or a just relation between labor and capital would be not only futile but also mystifying. At this point there is no more back and forth movement, and no more analogies. The different social realms and the different time periods seem finally to come together in Negri’s analysis. The only system of value that can be legitimate—in justice as in economics and in the ancient world as well as the contemporary—is one that is based on human power and creativity. The creation beyond measure that characterizes human labor is the true figure of the divine.