

The disappearance of “fraternity” from economic discussion: does it matter?

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The term “fraternity” seems disappeared from economic theorizing and from the economic discussion in general (see Gui 2009, p. 184).

The aim of my paper is to investigate whether the fact that such an expression has slipped out of the economic – and in general of social sciences – discussion matters.

In order to do this, the current research will provide a complete framework of the concepts related to “fraternity” that are involved in economics and analyze them with reference to the connections they might have with “fraternity”.

Firstly, I will give a definition of “fraternity”. It generally refers to “friendship and support between people who feel they are closely linked to each other” as per stated in the Collins English dictionary.

However, in addition to this general dictionary meaning, I will describe broadly what “fraternity” means in the economic discourse.

Secondly, in order to ascertain why the concept in question is not often used in economics, I will compare it with other words that appear to be synonyms.

The idea is that fraternity, which is a concept that can be traced back to the XVIII century (*liberté, égalité, fraternité*), refers to something similar to terms used in economic theory in the past by many scholars.

Indeed, Adam Smith had already introduced the notions of “sympathy”, “mutual sympathy”, “fellow-feeling” (Smith 1776/1976) which seem to share aspects in common with “fraternity”, widely understood.

Moreover, also Antonio Genovesi, an Italian Neapolitan Enlightenment scholar, dealt with the idea of “friendship” and “mutual assistance” (Genovesi 1765/2013; see also Nalli 2021).

In addition to these two economists, who respectively can be considered as the founding father of political economy and civil economy, it is to be point out that concepts that remind “fraternity” were used also by economists ascribable to the liberal tradition.

John Stuart Mill developed his thought concerning the idea of “mutual advantage” (Mill 1871/1909), which it has been revisited and interpreted by Robert Sugden (Sugden 2018). The

latter often alludes to the idea of “mutual benefit”, which it is used as an interchangeable phrasing of “mutual advantage”, in his book and he has also recently focused on this dimension again (Isoni, Sugden, Zheng, 2023). In the past, he also explored the dimension of “fraternity” properly intended (Bruni and Sugden 2008).

Among XX century liberal scholars, also Friedrich A. Hayek, although in a different manner, was concerned with the idea of “social justice” that could be linked with “fraternity” too (Hayek 1978).

Furthermore, I will analyze the relationship between the generic conception of “social preferences” (such as fairness, reciprocity and altruism) and “fraternity”.

After having examined the links that may exist among the aforementioned candidate synonyms and having compared them with “fraternity”, I will focus on what “fraternity” has lost in the economic discussion.

To conclude, I will establish if there are concepts that might be considered synonyms of “fraternity” and why “fraternity” in economics has received little interest compared to other similar but differently nuanced notions.

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