



Department SEMINARS

“Where is merit?” Maffeo
Pantaleoni’s starting and ending
positions on equality of opportunity

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A B S T R A C T

Maffeo Pantaleoni’s *Nota sui caratteri delle posizioni iniziali e sull’influenza che le posizioni iniziali esercitano sulle terminali* (1901) has not yet received specific scholarly attention, especially from the perspective of the intellectual history of inequality. While Maccabelli (2008) had pointed out the importance of Pantaleoni’s discussion of equality of opportunity on both the statistician Rodolfo Benini’s later works on the matter, and most importantly Luigi Einaudi’s *Lezioni di politica sociale* (Maccabelli, 2012), we still lack a reconstruction of the origins and development of Pantaleoni’s own reflection on the matter – a radically anti-egalitarian theoretical contribution, fiercely opposing any redistributive policy intervention. In this paper, I reconstruct the starting points of Pantaleoni’s radical views on the matter, by a survey of his earlier works. Then, I place this contribution within the academic and policy milieu of its time (starting from the infamous proposal by Rignano, 1901), to discuss the links with Pantaleoni’s own later policy proposal, the abolition of inheritance taxation (Pantaleoni, 1928). Together with this anti-egalitarian tradition within Italian economics, the paper highlights overlooked debates, involving major Italian and international economists, on inequality and redistribution, against conventional narratives on its “disappearance” after the classics.

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