



Routledge Advances in Heterodox Economics

PRINCIPLES AND PLURALIST APPROACHES IN TEACHING ECONOMICS

TOWARDS A TRANSFORMATIVE SCIENCE

Edited by
Samuel Decker, Wolfram Elsner and
Svenja Flechtner



Principles and Pluralist Approaches in Teaching Economics

This volume is a state-of-the-art compilation of diverse and innovative perspectives, principles, and a number of practiced approaches of fields, courses, and methods of pluralist economics teaching. It fosters constructive controversy aiming to incite authors and commentators to engage in fruitful debate.

The complex economic problems of the 21st century require a pluralist, real-world oriented, and innovative discipline of economics, capable of addressing and teaching those complex issues to students from diverse perspectives. This volume addresses a number of key questions: Which models could be taught outside the equilibrium and optimality paradigm? Which methods could help to improve our understanding of the complex globalized economy? How can qualitative and quantitative methods be combined in a fruitful way to analyze complex economic problems? How can the academic isolation of mainstream economics that has developed over many decades be overcome, despite its attempted transdisciplinary imperialism? What role should knowledge from other disciplines play in teaching economics, and what is the relevance of transdisciplinarity? Through examining these issues, the editors and authors have created a pluralist but cohesive book on teaching economics in the contemporary classroom, drawing from ideas and examples from around the world.

Principles and Pluralist Approaches in Teaching Economics is a unique collection of diverse perspectives on the methodology and applications of pluralist economics teaching. It will be a great resource for those teaching economics at various levels as well as researchers and intermediate and advanced students searching for pluralism in economics.

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Routledge Advances in Heterodox Economics

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Over the past two decades, the intellectual agendas of heterodox economists have taken a decidedly pluralist turn. Leading thinkers have begun to move beyond the established paradigms of Austrian, feminist, Institutional-evolutionary, Marxian, Post Keynesian, radical, social, and Sraffian economics – opening up new lines of analysis, criticism, and dialogue among dissenting schools of thought. This cross-fertilization of ideas is creating a new generation of scholarship in which novel combinations of heterodox ideas are being brought to bear on important contemporary and historical problems.

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Principles and Pluralist Approaches in Teaching Economics

Towards a Transformative Science

**Edited by Samuel Decker, Wolfram
Elsner and Svenja Flechtner**

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Towards a pluralist economic education for a transformative science – introduction

*Samuel Decker, Wolfram Elsner
and Svenja Flechtner*

1 Economics and the challenges of the 21st century

In a volume corresponding to the present one, which we edited under the title *Advancing Pluralism in Teaching Economics* (see Decker et al. 2018), the contributors set out how economics as a serious social science can advance our knowledge only as a pluralist discipline – and how this criterion likewise applies to modern teaching and textbook writing. While that volume had a focus on *epistemological* foundations of a potential future pluralist economics, in the present one we will proceed to more *applied* contributions, which cover *principles* (Part I) as well as specific *approaches* (Part II) of pluralist teaching. A final part (Part III) of this volume will generalize again and will reflect on the perspective of economics as a transformative science.

The debate on the shortcomings of mainstream economics and the development of pluralism as a possible alternative may of course not neglect the societal context in which scientific discourse and epistemic change are embedded. As the financial crisis that began in 2008 has illustrated, economics both contributes to and is influenced by developments in the real world. A transformation of the economics curriculum towards pluralism thus needs to be considered against the *manifold crisis symptoms* that have characterized the first two decades of the 21st century. Economic, ecological, societal, and political crises do reinforce each other, and the resulting “new mediocre” of economic growth and its fragility are well recognized even by the established bodies of global governance (see IMF 2015). As a part of that, a political crisis of neoliberalism has taken shape against a globalization obviously gone astray. Billions of people have lost through it at the end of the day, and nationalist, racist, and homophobic political forces, authoritarian politicians, governments, and regimes gain power across the globe and even in the industrialized core countries of neoliberalism. These and other cultural and political changes are seen by some observers as Polanyian “counter-movements” of people against the “marketization” and “capitalization” of their labor, land, money, the redistribution from bottom to top and other conditions of life deteriorating – how misled such reactions ever may be. Inequality levels are at record heights, and entire societies have been left behind by such globalization (Novy 2017).

Those complex challenges of the unfolding 21st century should be met by an active support of democratic-participatory problem-solving through a pluralistic

economic discipline. Only the plurality of existing scientific perspectives and paradigms as well as of questions, answers, and recommendations appear to be able to sufficiently inform and inspire public debate, political parties, governments, or social movements to find sustainable economic, ecological, and societal answers to the multiple crises.

As has been discussed in the volume *Advancing Pluralism in Teaching Economics*, mainstream economics has not sufficiently moved towards a pluralist, real-world oriented and innovative discipline – and particularly so in teaching – that would enable students, policy makers, and the public to address the complex challenges. The inclusion of a number of new topics as well as theoretical and methodological elements from behavioral and complexity economics in research cannot conceal the fact that the general state of the discipline’s mainstream continues to be critical. Where an open, intense, and diverse discussion on the future of financialized capitalism, globalization, the role of markets, and the environment would be appropriate, a limited set of theories, models, and methods restricts the debate. Where the best solutions to the right questions would be urgently needed to tackle ecological, economic, and social crises, economics students are taught a narrow set of highly standardized “equilibrium” and “optimality” perspectives and “market”-oriented (re-)interpretations as well as pedagogical approaches.

The dominating monism in economics, and particularly so in economics teaching, thus is a barrier to the development of sustainable answers to the multiple crisis, and the rise of backward forces even in the leading capitalist countries reflects this lack of economic pluralism and of knowledge of alternatives. The backward forces address the problems without addressing their causes, and so the multiple crisis worsens and gives rise to even more authoritarian forms of crisis management. The lack of pluralism thus contributes to a crisis of democracy itself. Monism in economics, in other words, appears to be a pressing political problem that necessitates a transformation of economics towards pluralism.

2 A dissolving economics mainstream? Not in education and teaching

In the aforementioned volume corresponding with the present one, we also tackled the thesis of an increasing dissolution, fragmentation, and specialization of the economic mainstream, as forwarded by a number of prominent non-mainstream economists (e.g. Colander 2000, 2010; Colander et al. 2011; Dow 2008; Davis 2016; Fontana 2014; Cedrini and Fontana 2017). We argued that this basically refers to economic research only and holds considerably less for economics education, teaching, and textbook writing. The latter still is a field of monism, dogmatism, and exclusion – still widely underdeveloped as a complex, real-world, and modern scientific discipline.

Economics education and textbook writing have been tackled at all, and critically tackled as a major problem, only in recent years (Elsner 2013, 2017; Schneider and Underwood 2013; Hoyt and McGoldrick 2013; ISIPE 2014). It had been argued for long that, while many mainstream researchers have turned away from

simplistic conceptions of optimality and unique predetermined equilibrium in research, and to a more complex understanding of real economies, the discipline has increasingly displayed a “schizophrenia” between research and teaching/textbook writing (e.g. Elsner 2009).

In *Advancing Pluralism in Teaching Economics*, we also argued that the realization of pluralism in teaching economics faces three challenges: the need for a well-developed and epistemologically founded scientific program, for a true internationalization of economic thought, and for alternatives to the mainstream textbook system. Beyond those challenges that we addressed there, pluralism in teaching economics also faces more applied problems. An obvious problem for pluralism is to show that valuable and insightful alternative approaches do exist. The actually existing plurality of economic thinking still has to be made more visible and virulent. A practical challenge in this respect is the lack of principles of pluralist teaching – it should be made clearer how different paradigms and perspectives can be taught together practically, as classes and syllabi are limited.

In the present volume, accordingly, we proceed to present a number of more applied and practical principles as well as field-related approaches and course syllabi to pluralist teaching. Additionally, we present theories, models, methods, and hands-on course curricula in fields such as

- Political economy
- Macro, monetary, post-Keynesian economics, and income distribution
- Ecological economics and sustainability
- Feminist economics
- Microeconomics, sectoral approaches
- Economics and ethics
- Interdisciplinary and paradigm-comparing approaches to pluralist teaching.

3 The present volume

Part I of this volume (“Principles for teaching pluralist economics”) offers systematizations, methods, and experiences of pluralist teaching. Alan Freeman (“The second opinion: an ethical approach to learning and teaching economics”) shares his experience of a pedagogical approach to pluralism and heterodox thinking in university courses that he based on the ethical responsibility of the professional economist. The ethical response, he argues, is the pluralist one: the professional should consider a range of different alternative research and policy perspectives. This chapter also draws on the author’s experience in government to show how pluralism allows practical questions to be approached ethically. Finally, the approach also implies a guide to curriculum design.

Andreas Dimmelmeier, Frederick Heussner, Andrea Pürckhauer, and Janina Urban (“Making the incommensurable comparable: a comparative approach to pluralist economics education”) develop central categories which allow for systematic comparisons between different theoretical perspectives. The

meta-theoretical patterns of 10 selected schools of economic thought are then visualized in a comparative way. This highly innovative systematization is grounded in concepts derived from biology, the history of economic thought, the philosophy of science, and international political economy and builds the intellectual basis for the online learning platform Exploring Economics (www.exploring-economics.org/en/).

Stephan Panther (“What can teaching critical pluralist economics gain from ‘de-othering’ sociology?”) argues for the inclusion of an economic sociological perspective into the curriculum, and sketches a course on capitalist markets as an illustration. Karl Betz and Martin Ehret (“Comparing paradigms on a level playing field”) develop a one-term introductory course in economics which compares classical, neoclassical, and Keynesian economics. The comparison is done within the same framework (level playing field) so that it becomes obvious which differences are due to the perspective of the paradigm and not just to different ways of modeling.

Michael Derrer (“It needs two eyes to see in perspective: teaching economics through the confrontation of dissenting views”) proposes in his short manual-like comment to put one-sided textbooks to use by confronting them with critical texts. Alexander Lenger, Yvette Keipke, and Nils Goldschmidt (“Economic competence, economic understanding, and reflexive judgment: a social theory of teaching teachers of economics”) are concerned with economics education in schools, and they discuss how teachers must be educated in universities in order to be able to facilitate an economics education in schools that renders school students able to critically think about the economies they live in.

Part II (“Approaches and building blocks”) collects contributions that integrate different schools of thoughts in their teaching practice (“approaches”) and/or contain innovative teaching perspectives on the respective school of thought (“building blocks”). Johannes Jäger (“Introduction to critical political economy in a multi-paradigmatic setting”) opens the part with a chapter on how to integrate political economy with other paradigms in teaching. His insights are further developed and practically applied by himself and his co-author, Elisabeth Springer, in the following chapter (“Heterodox perspectives in teaching the European integration and crisis: critical political economy and post-Keynesianism”), which contrasts a critical political economy approach with a post-Keynesian approach to teaching European integration.

Peter Söderbaum bundles his long-standing research and teaching experience with ecological economics and pluralism (“Ecological economics in research and teaching: a matter of theoretical and ideological perspective”). Jack Reardon and Maria Alejandra Madi (“Suggestions for incorporating sustainability into the macroeconomics course”) develop another concrete course suggestion for some integration of ecological economics and macroeconomics. Jonathan Barth and Oliver Richters (“Demand-driven ecological collapse: a stock-flow fund-service model of money, energy and ecological scale”) put forward an example of how different schools in monetary economics and ecological economics can be analyzed and taught in an integrated way by developing economic models that apply

the modern macroeconomic approach of stock-flow consistency, combining it in disaggregated, sectoral input-output models. Genna Miller's chapter ("Teaching feminist economics through student-written diaries") provides an instructive example of how non-mainstream paradigms may offer not only highly needed alternative analyses but also innovative pedagogical approaches.

Frank Beckenbach ("Undermining the microeconomic textbook approach: steps towards competitive pluralism") presents microeconomic concepts for teaching that treat the real-world economic complexity differently from the dominant monistic approach. It shows how to gradually exit from that approach by stepwise enhancing the range of phenomena that microeconomics can explain, introducing different basic assumptions and modeling methods. Hansjörg Herr ("Functional income distribution in economic paradigms: the failure of the neoclassical approach and alternatives") shares his rich experience in teaching post-Keynesian economics and focuses on the issue of inequality as a virtual blind spot of mainstream teaching. Dirk Ehnts ("The balance sheet approach to macroeconomics") displays a proposal to rebase macroeconomic teaching on insights of monetary theory. Stefan Kesting ("How to teach ethics and economics to undergraduate students?") contributes a conception of teaching ethics in economics as applied in undergraduate studies at the Leeds University Business School (UK). Peter Dorman ("Addressing controversies in economics instruction through interdisciplinary learning communities: the Evergreen experience") builds on his long teaching experience at an institution that employs interdisciplinary learning communities as its primary pedagogical vehicle. He demonstrates that interdisciplinarity leads organically to a more heterodox approach to economic content.

Considering the transformative capacities of economics, and of a future pluralist economics in particular, we added as a documentation an extract from an overview paper of the UK-based pluralist accreditation initiative *Promoting Economic Pluralism – PEP* by founder and CEO of PEP, Henry Leveson-Gower. In some aspects, PEP appears to be the furthest developed current approach to foster a plural economic teaching and learning (together with, for example, the students' initiative Exploring Economics). PEP's initiatives set up so far have had a surprisingly broad public resonance, and its list of supporters is most impressive, crossing over business, politics, civil society, and academia. The text provided does not originate from academia proper but contributes a perspective from "practice" and practitioners, but the arguments of this text are uniquely well considered and concise. It is a must-know and a perfect complement to the present volume and the endeavors of its authors and editors.

Obviously, these "approaches" to and "building blocks" of future pluralist economics teaching in a number of disciplinary fields – one-field didactical approaches, field-comparing approaches, and paradigm-comparing approaches – presented in this part are still rather selective and by no means piece together a complete picture of the already existing pluralist teaching conceptions and courses in economics. We may sort the contributions to this volume, which have been developed in a diverse practical heterodox space and in fact are multidimensionally interrelated, in a simplifying scheme (Table I.1).

Table I.1 Sorting the contributions to this volume after their thematic focus and field of application

Thematic Focus (Discipline-, Paradigm-, and Field- Related)	Meta-theoretic	Inter- disciplinarity	Disciplinary				
			Paradigms Comparing		Field-Related		
			Micro Economics	Macro Economics, Political Economy; Post- Keynesianism, Money	Ecology Sustainability; Degrowth	Feminist Economics	
Field of Application (Didactic-, Method-, Course-, and Praxis-Related)	Kesting, Ethics and Economics Freeman, Second Opinion Lenger, Keipke, Goldschmidt, A Social Theory of Teaching Teachers	Panther, De-Othering Sociology	Derrer, Dissenting Views; Dimmelmeier et al., Comparative Approach; Jaeger, Multi- Paradigmatic Perspective	Beckenbach, Micro- Economic Textbook Approach	Jaeger/ Springler, Political Economy and Post-Keynesianism in EU-Integration Herr, Income Distribution	Söderbaum, Ecological Economics	
Method- Related: Stock- Flow/ Input- Output							Richters/Barth, Monetary and Ecological Economics

Balance-Sheet Approach	Ehnts, Macro-Economics	Miller, Feminist Economics
Qualitative methods		
Course-Related	Dorman, Interdisciplinary Learning Communities	Betz, Comparing Paradigms;
Praxis-Transformative Science	Barth/Rommel, Transformative Economics, and Society; Pluralist study program accreditation (PEP)	Decker, Critical transformative Science
	Reardon/Madi, Macroeconomics and Sustainability	Sanders, Transformation and Degrowth

While an emphasis of most contributions is *general didactical principles and approaches*, there are two papers anchored in a *specific method* (Barth and Richters, Ehnts), both in macroeconomics (one also in ecology) and two explicitly *course-related*, also in macroeconomics (and in ecology) (Betz, Reardon, and Madi). The chapters discussing general didactical principles and approaches, in turn, have a *comparative focus*, both in *interdisciplinarity* (Panther, Dorman) and *disciplinary paradigm-comparisons* (Freeman, Derrer, Dimmelmeier et al., Jäger). Another subgroup in this horizontal category is related to particular *substantial fields* of economic research and even (pluralist) teaching *courses*, such as *micro-economics* (Beckenbach), *political economy* and *post-Keynesianism* (Jäger and Springler), *income distribution* (Herr), *ecological economics* (Söderbaum), and *feminist economics* (Miller). Another meta-theoretic field, with the potential of a course in a pluralist education conception, is economics and *ethics* (Kesting).

The scheme also indicates potential gaps of pluralist economic education that we will focus on in the conclusion of this book. The perspectives of different schools and the integrated applications to teaching should be considered exemplary, illustrating the richness of economic thought and hopefully stimulating further pluralist teaching developments and experiments. For teaching pluralist economics there exists no ready-made blueprint. The manifold teaching approaches in this volume, rather, should be understood as a compass that may demonstrate the directions for a deliberate transformation of economics. In this sense, this volume presents a recent state of the art of pluralist teaching.

3.1 Towards a progressive, problem-solving transformative science

We have argued that pluralism in economics is fundamental to equip societal cognitive and democratic-participatory processes with the best ideas and solutions to address current multiple crises symptoms and gain new insights for society and its ongoing process of inquiry. The question remains, however, whether teaching diversity and pluralism will suffice to challenge mainstream economics and intervene in society in problem-solving and sustainable ways. A conscious transformation of economics should not only be understood as a change of teaching concepts and contents, but also as a change of the relationship between economics, the economy, environment, and society (e.g. Elsner 2017). The concept of a transformative science, therefore, envisages a pluralist, democratic-participatory economic science that contributes to a progressive, socio-ecological transformation.

The concept of transformative science has been developed since the turn of the millennium and has been previously applied in natural sciences. It proceeds from the assumption that science is always socially embedded and subjected to societal and political boundaries. The latter shape the construction of research questions, their processing in the scientific system, and the societal utilization of research results. Beyond this wide definition of *performativity*, the concept of *transformative science*, as defined by Schneidewind et al. (2016), is accompanied by a political-normative understanding of the role of science in the context of ecological depletion and cataclysmic climate destruction. Instead of masking such social impact of economics and hiding it behind “value-free” algebra, economics

should reflect its societal position and impact and utilize it to support transformations towards sustainability. In their call for a “new contract between science and society”, for example, 60 German-speaking economists have recently demanded a “transformative economics”, which is supposed to operationalize sustainability goals in the realm of the economic-policy system (see Schneidewind et al. 2016).

The contributions in Part III of the volume (“Teaching for socio-ecological transformation: economics as a transformative science?”) therefore link the debate on pluralism in economics with the concept of transformative science. Samuel Decker (“Contours of a critical transformative science”) refers to the approach of Critical Theory as developed by the Frankfurt School in order to reformulate the approach of transformative economics as a branch of critical social science. Jonathan Barth and Florian Rommel (“Transformative economics – calling for a more conscious relationship between economics and society”) elaborate on the performative characteristics of economics and propose concrete strategies for realizing a conscious transformative science. Christoph Sanders (“Tackling the roots: (economic) education for social-ecological transformations and degrowth societies”) asks how economic education can contribute to a social-ecological transformation. In our conclusion (“Pluralist economics is taking shape. But further steps have to follow – conclusion”), we point out empty spaces of pluralism and further steps the project of pluralism has to take. Finally, in the documentation mentioned, Henry-Leveson-Gower demonstrates with the initiative PEP that a future transformative economics has a pillar, and a most important one, already in real-world areas, where interests of practitioners in a plural economics have already been clearly articulated.

We consider the selected contributions of the present volume – general principles for pluralist teaching, more applied pedagogic conceptions, and the broader transformational impact of economics – only as a stepping stone in a debate on *the transformation of economics and on economics as a transformative science*. Like teaching pluralism, transformative science is no monolithic concept supposed to replace existing paradigms. It is supposed, rather, to foster cooperation among diverse schools, paradigms, disciplines, and political specters in order to transform the social sciences and to contribute to the social-ecological transformation needed in the multiple crisis of capitalist globalization. We hope to have provided with the present volume a pertinent source of approaches to a pluralist economics and to a transformative economic discipline, which will help building more fruitful, broader, and longer-run societal problem-solving capacities.

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Part I

Principles for teaching pluralist economics



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1 The second opinion

An ethical approach to learning and teaching economics

Alan Freeman

1 Introduction: economics, pluralism, and the right to a second opinion

The chapter suggests that the best way to introduce students to the pluralist method in economics, and thereby heterodox alternatives to the mainstream, is to focus on the ethical responsibilities of the professional economist. Teaching and learning can then be organised around the principle that the economist, analogously with the health practitioner, has a duty to reduce the risk of harm.

As first suggested in Freeman (2015), the primary way in which economists do harm is by unjustifiably claiming that their analyses or recommendations are true when these have not been validated by testing them against alternative explanations of reality. This practice occurs because economics, unlike any other branch of the sciences, adheres to the monotheoretic fallacy (Freeman 2015) that we can develop an adequate understanding of an object of study by pursuing a single theoretical approach, based on a single set of presuppositions, without considering other approaches.

This denies the public the ‘right to a second opinion’, accepted in health care and other human sciences. This is the right to be informed of all those possible analyses which would lead to alternative courses of action to that recommended by the expert, allowing it the autonomy to make its own informed decisions based on the combination of the advice given, its own experience, and its own requirements.

Monotheoreticism demonstrably leads to false analyses, confirmed by the experience of structural readjustment, shock therapy, the financial crash of 2008, and other areas (DeMartino 2011; Earle et al. 2017; Freeman 2009). This leads to harm because the public either adopts, or consents to, policies that make things worse than they could have been, had alternatives known at the time been adopted in their place. Economists bear responsibility for this harm if they have made unjustified claims of truth, misleading the public into placing trust in their analyses and the courses of action that flow from them.

The primary duty of the economist is to avoid doing harm in this way. To fulfil this duty, the would-be economist must be aware of and capable of deducing, presenting, and clarifying the range of alternative explanations of reality that are relevant in deciding on the courses of action at issue. This practice, called pluralism,

is already known to be a scientific requirement in economics (Freeman 2015) because, unless alternative relevant explanations of observed reality have been considered, we cannot justifiably claim that one single explanation has been validated. We can now further clarify that pluralism is not only valid on the grounds of methodology and epistemology, as recognised in the literature and elucidated in many contributions to this volume, but also constitutes an *ethical* duty of any practicing economist – including its teachers and researchers – precisely because it is unethical to inspire trust in a statement that scientifically does not merit it when that trust leads to harm.

No claim is involved that the alternatives are automatically right, or that the public will necessarily make the correct decision, any more than a doctor asserts that patients are better able to cure their conditions than health practitioners. The point is simply that the risk of ‘econogenic’ harm – harm caused by economists – is greater if the public, or the client, is not informed of the alternatives, just as the risk of iatrogenic harm – harm caused by doctors – is greater if the patient is not informed of the alternatives.¹

Just as a professional doctor will say, ‘I diagnose cancer for which the currently recommended treatment is a combination of surgery and chemotherapy, but there are known risks associated with this; you should consider the following possible alternative treatments’, the economist should be able, and required, to say things such as ‘I diagnose excessive government spending for which the currently recommended prescription is a combination of austerity, cuts in government spending, deregulation, and privatisation. However, you should consider the alternative diagnosis that the economic problems stem from insufficient government income caused by idle economic capacity, and various alternative prescriptions that this view leads to, such as monetary and fiscal stimuli financed by appropriate taxes and responsible borrowing’.

This principle also governs the equivalent heterodox statement, which might run something like, ‘I diagnose inadequate levels of economic activity for which there are a number of prescriptions including monetary stimulus, fiscal demand stimuli, and direct government investment in new capacity, all of which should be considered. However, there are a number of alternative theories, for example that the underlying problem is the lack of controls on government spending. Prescriptions would then range from reigning in the excess to outsourcing inefficient government functions to the private sector’.

The idea that the responsibility of the economist is to propose a range of possible alternatives, along with the reasons for preferring one over the other, is hence, as increasingly recognised, a systemic and comprehensive antidote to the reigning logical positivist idea that the economists’ responsibility is to be ‘technically competent’ in prescribing a single package of policy options derived from the single theoretical framework of prevailing orthodoxy.

This chapter makes a further proposal: that pluralism, thus defined, is not merely superior as a practice but as *pedagogy* – a means of enabling the student to learn. That is to say, it is a better way to learn and (therefore) a better way to teach.

2 Pluralism as pedagogical best practice

Because pluralism is thus a general principle applying to all of economics, not just an antidote to orthodoxy, we can evolve and assess general pedagogic methods in economics based on it. The novelty of this chapter's approach, as noted above, is that it treats monotheoreticism as an ethical in addition to a scientific failure; pluralism thus constitutes an ethical duty.

This approach provides a pedagogical reason for pluralism, a rather critical point. Much pluralist writing on education starts from epistemological or methodological bases for pluralism and then addresses the problems arising from the entrenched resistance of course designers from within the subject. The pluralist pedagogue, in any subject, is often up against the unwritten convention that the subject specialists 'know' what is to be taught, so that the only problem is how to teach it. Why 'waste time' familiarising students with what is 'known' to be untrue? The informed pedagogical answer is, of course, that even if we are 100% certain of our present knowledge, it is only by encountering ideas that contradict said knowledge that the student can learn. A yet more precise answer is that in any case, the student is tasked not merely with acquiring some fixed thing called 'knowledge' but with learning how to generate new knowledge, which requires her to be capable of interrogating ideas critically and experimenting with alternatives.

Economics presents a further damaging twist to this uninformed prejudice. Uniquely, the subject specialists define 'knowledge' of the subject as mastery of a single legitimate methodological approach. The case for reform thereby appears internal to the subject, leading to a permanent uphill battle. As Dow (2009, 53) puts it:

When the impression has been created that there is only one legitimate approach to economics (within which there may be differences of theory and method, but not methodology), it is hard to get across a methodologically-pluralist approach.

Ethical responsibility is a different starting point: it is a generic curricular requirement. It follows from the fact that the student, when she becomes a practitioner, will have influence in society, which she should know how to exercise responsibly. The conduct of experts is as important as the expertise itself – otherwise the infamous Josef Mengele, who justified lethal experiments in the death camps on the grounds that the knowledge gained would contribute to medical science, should be celebrated as a pioneering investigator. Ethics is, for precisely this reason, increasingly recognised as a generic requirement of learning at the higher education level, indeed especially – and interestingly – in technological subjects (Fry et al. 2009, 295–296). A growing number of universities publicly and explicitly state (see e.g. Sheffield 2011) that any and every student that graduates from the university will be ethically aware and competent.

This point is poorly understood and therefore worth establishing at greater length. In 2007 the Association for Heterodox Economics (Freeman 2007), in response to

an exercise by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), compared benchmarked curricula in a range of subjects and found that economics was alone in omitting any requirement for diversity. The point is stark when these benchmarks are studied. The following extracts are taken from the responses of the other subjects.

Theology

Given that constant new development has been the characteristic of the field of TRS [Theology and Religions Studies] since the latter half of the twentieth century, both in the UK and elsewhere, it is vital that any definition of the subject does not constrain future innovation . . . Much of the excitement of the discipline lies in its contested nature.

Accountancy

[K]nowledge and understanding of some of the alternative technical languages and practices of accounting (for example, alternative recognition rules and valuation bases, accounting rules followed in other socio-economic domains, alternative managerial accounting approaches to control and decision-making) . . . the ability to critically evaluate such theories and evidence.

Earth sciences

It is stressed that the examples which follow should not be taken as prescriptive but are presented to illustrate the variation in emphasis from subject areas which can be described as natural sciences-based to those characterised as more social sciences or humanities-based.

History

We have seen our task as the following: to lay out criteria for judging the suitability and adequacy of single-honours degree courses in history; to do this in a way that is as specific as possible without undermining the principle that there are many different suitable and adequate ways of constructing and making available the great richness and diversity of history; to do it in a way that recognises also the need for adaptability to new academic developments in the field, and innovations in course structures and teaching methods.

Geography

The breadth of geography means that many of its core constituents can be approached through a number of routes, and so any attempts at prescription must be discarded; institutions offering degree programmes in geography must be free to decide upon the details of content and organisation. A valued characteristic of the discipline is its plurality of ways of knowing and understanding the world, and the depth to which individual specialisms are studied will vary according to the nature of specific departments.

The AHE's report (Freeman 2007, 8) concluded that

Faced with a benchmark less critical of its prescriptions than theology and which attaches less importance to diversity than accountancy, it is hard to accept that iterative reform is a practical procedure. This is why we consider a complete rethink to be necessary. Such a complete rethink should review the QAA statements of the whole of the peer disciplines with which, it is recognised in the statement, economists should be able to interact.

In short, the problematic can and should be reversed: pluralism is a requirement of good curricular practice which is generally recognised in other subjects, and economics sticks out like a very sore thumb. The problem of economics course design is not 'introducing' pluralism into the curriculum against the received wisdom of the subject specialists but bringing the teaching of the subject into line with recognised modern curricular principles.

This becomes clearer the more we study the issues involved in curriculum design. A central such problem, evident in alternative curricula which adopt the mantle of heterodoxy while discarding pluralism (see Coyle 2012; INET 2011 and the critical response from Morgan et al. 2014), is an issue I will term the 'pluralist selection problem' or 'selection problem' for short:² which, out of many alternative approaches, should be presented in a course, and how much weight should be assigned to each of them?

First, an ethical standpoint resolves this problem in a strikingly clear manner. The approaches that should be included are those which the would-be economist needs to know, in order to identify the alternatives relevant to the problems she will be called on to answer. These are of two types. Some are more or less directly relevant to a practical question, such as trade policy, public choice, or fiscal policy. In each such field, the range of options which lead to clearly different conclusions is usually limited and accessible.

Second, the student needs to be familiar with the 'underpinnings' – the theoretical foundations – of such options. To understand the rationale for a state-led development theory, for example, the economist cannot make do with a concept of trade rooted in the theory of comparative advantage; she needs to be familiar with theories of uneven development, unequal exchange, and so on, not to mention the theoretical frameworks usually employed to understand the state's potential developmental role, notably Keynesian, Marxist, and institutionalist theories. It is not difficult to see that with a little thought and application, this can lead to a well-grounded curriculum offering a range of specialisations to the student, without in any way constraining her to master one single body of theory or one single set of technical skills.

The approach thereby resolves, in a quite satisfactory way, the problem of rationale. This arises, among other reasons, because it is hard for students to know, in advance of receiving tuition, why the material being presented is relevant. This is especially important in economics, when much teaching of a highly technical nature is simply presented to the students without any real explanation of what it

is for, leading to frequently repeated and probably legitimate objections, especially from students, that the focus on mathematics technique is at best an obstacle, and at worst a substitute, for discussing the real world (Lawson 2006; PAE 2016; PCES 2015; RE 2017).

The problems of selection and rationale intersect when students have to navigate through a curriculum structure and make their own selections about which subjects to specialise in. The ethical approach, I will argue, provides a practical approach to both problems and, thereby, a coherent general framework for pluralist curriculum design.

3 Economics, the non-specialist, and the cult of the expert

In this middle section of the chapter, I will try to explain the relation between the ‘ethical approach to pluralist economic pedagogy’ and the various traditions from which it emerges. This is needed, I think, both because the history of any theory is an important element of its development, and because the approach as far as I know is novel, which can be an obstacle to acceptance, unless I can convince my readers that it is a synthesis of existing work, not a replacement, and that it both preserves the most important elements of what went before, and addresses one or two critical problems that these prior traditions have noted as important but have not solved to their own satisfaction.

This chapter draws on a 15-year history of research on the place of pluralism and heterodoxy in economics (Lee 2007; Lee and Harley 1998; Lee et al. 2013) and the adverse consequences of its absence (Chick and Dow 2001; Dow 2009; Freeman 2009; Freeman et al. 2014; Earle et al. 2017), leading to a wide range of student movements for pluralism across the world (see ISIPE 2015; RE 2017 for comprehensive lists). This has been accompanied by an impressive literature on pluralist pedagogy (Denis 2009; Groenewegen 2007; McGoldrick 2009; Mearman 2011; Morgan et al. 2014; Negru 2010; Reardon 2009, and many others).

The idea of an ethical approach to pedagogy, I believe, constitutes a potentially pathbreaking extension of this tradition. I attempt to integrate it into the pioneering work of DeMartino and McCloskey (2015), and their co-workers and predecessors (Zingales 2013; Thompson 1983, 1987; see also DeMartino 2011; Amy 1984) for which pluralism is not (yet) a central focus, but which has put the issue of ethical conduct at the forefront of recent debates in the United States, with considerable success.³

For those in the ‘pluralist-heterodox’ stream, a focus on ethics can seem a departure or even a diversion. I will argue, however, that it makes sense of pluralist methodology in a way that has been to some extent obstructed by a focus on technical details until now. An ethical approach grounds the need for pluralism in the actual social function of economists today; it asks, ‘How can one be a good economist?’

As a result, an ethical approach explains to the non-economist why pluralism is required and why society should demand it. The moment one asks what makes for good economists, one has to ask, ‘What kind of economists does society need?’

This starting point has many advantages: not least, it explains the importance of disputes whose technical complexity appears, to the non-specialist, to be too difficult to warrant meddling with.

It should, I hope, be clear why non-specialist perceptions are relevant to pedagogy: every student of economics starts her professional life as a non-specialist. A beginning student is almost by definition a person whose state of knowledge should be assumed to be no different from that of an ordinary member of the public. The student who sets out to be a good economist therefore faces a set of problems not that different from a non-economist who would like to know how to tell good economists from bad ones, preferably before experiencing their ministrations.

The common factor is that in both cases, the person needs to know why it could be important to study a particular approach or theory. Most difficult of all, for such a person, is to understand why one has to study more than one particular approach.

This reaction produces bafflement among heterodox economists understandably frustrated by the actions of funders and providers who support, defend, and award prizes to teachers of economic theories that they know in their heart of hearts have got things seriously wrong. Discussions with public servants, education providers, and practical business people reveals deep unease about the profession.⁴ What explains their reluctance to confront its weaknesses?

Certainly, a non-ignorable factor is the regulatory capture of economics by private interests (Freeman 2009; Zingales 2013). It is convenient, for politicians, bankers, and corporate providers alike, to have economic experts who can help them justify otherwise unpopular policies. This is, however, not the only problem: non-specialists find it difficult to involve themselves because mainstream-heterodox controversies are actually hard to understand. An increasingly angry section of the public may accept that neoliberalism, in addition to destroying social services, causes rising inequality and various other social evils, but far fewer have grappled with the case for government involvement in investment. This accounts for the paradox that a big section of the American working classes, exasperated with the corrosive neoliberalism of the Democrats, has voted to replace it with the explosively destructive neoliberalism of Donald Trump.

The ‘difficulty’ of understanding economic disputes is a considerable problem for heterodoxy because the lay public, faced with a bewildering mass of technical and often obscure arguments, naturally reacts by expecting the experts to sort it out for themselves. The problem is that economics has proven incapable of doing just that, which is why a public intervention is required. However, even if the public wants to change economics, it needs to be able to understand, in non-technical terms, the difference between good and bad economic practice in order to promote the good and root out the bad.

The basic pluralist response to the non-specialist question, ‘How do I tell a good economist from a bad one?’ is that monotheoretic practice is a sure sign of an unprofessional economist, unconditionally bad, and likely to end in tears. As for what is good, while pluralism is not a guarantee of merit, it is a precondition of it. The case for this answer is not, however, as transparent as we pluralists

like to think. Superficially, it conflicts with what we expect of an expert. If you hire a builder to make a house, you don't expect him to make two of them. When the lay public has a technical question, we are superficially inclined to think it has a single answer, or at least a single 'best' answer, and equally superficially it appears that this is what experts are for. Of course, we get annoyed if the answer is wrong, but the natural response of the non-specialist is to expect one right answer, not two.

It is at this point that two important strands of the new thinking intersect. The first, which DeMartino has inserted into the discussion on ethical conduct, is an earlier critique of the 'neutral' advisor (Amy 1984; Thompson 1983, 1987). Expertise is paid for, which leads directly to the question, 'Is the client paying for the expert, or for the answer?' In a system where one set of answers gets the funding, and the awkward answers don't, the expert is not playing a neutral role. Regulatory capture is relevant here; this is why, given the role of Big Pharma, the responsibility of the expert is of particular concern in medicine.

Whether neutral advice is existentially possible is a philosophically complex question. But we can set aside these complexities by noting that actually, we don't really like experts to give a single answer. Even when we take such simple advice as the salesperson's recommendation for a washing machine, a car, or a computer, we expect a knowledgeable account of the field. When we hire plumbers, engineers, architects, or lawyers, the first thing we check out these days are the rating pages.

In short, the function of an expert is not to give us an answer but to help us make an informed choice. But the need for a diversity of opinions does not stop when we hire the expert. We don't expect an architect to dump a plan on our lap with the words 'take it or leave it, my invoice is in the post'. In a session with a lawyer, a doctor, or even an accountant, we expect and we get advice on the range of possibilities. In health, as DeMartino points out, the principle of 'patient autonomy', meaning the need to ensure the patient is involved in decision-making in an informed way, is widely recognised. Indeed, in the world of expert services the more expensive the purchase, the more choice is offered. When hiring economic expertise that pays for the future of a country, a little bit of consumer sovereignty would not go amiss.

In short, *quaesitor oeconomicus*, the idealised economic expert, is as mythical as *Homo oeconomicus*, the idealised economic agent. Indeed, when it comes to the control of our own bodies, we are less inclined to trust the expert unquestioningly than when fixing the plumbing. In the field of health, the public is not only familiar with many issues but actively seeks knowledge, as can be seen from the wealth of medical websites, forums, and treatment alternatives. People do not just desire more than one answer, but if anything, insist on it. If, therefore, we explain the reason for pluralism in these terms – that is, to argue that in matters of economic health the right to a second opinion is just as essential as in private health – we are making an argument that can be understood. There is a solid, non-specialist case for pluralist practice and therefore an equally solid case for pluralist teaching.

4 Selection, rationale, and progression: confronting the fallacy of imposed choice

The relevance of ethical responsibility to pedagogy now takes a recognisable shape. The fundamental thing we want from our economists is that, confronted with any real-world problem, they will assist and permit us to minimise the risk of embarking on economically harmful courses of action. To this end, we want them to help us make informed judgements. This in turn requires the economist, just like the doctor, to report not just the one single recommendation of the economic authorities but to inform us about the relevant alternatives.

As noted, an immediate consequence is that the ethical approach offers an answer to the selection problem. In a report on economic development, for example, the ethical duty is not to present an exhaustive intellectual account of all known theories of commerce. It is a duty to consider notable alternatives to the view that is presented as the principal conclusion of the reporter. So if the reporter advocates the structural adjustment doctrine of deregulation, full trade liberalisation and privatisation, she or he has the duty to ensure the reader may access and study the alternatives and principal objections by directing the reader to their sources, such as the ‘other canon’ and developmental literature. Equally, a reporter who advocates capital controls, state-led investment, and national economic sovereignty should ensure the reader is aware of significant mainstream critiques of the heterodox conclusions drawn.

The duty is not 100% symmetric. Since the mainstream literature is generally more accessible to the normal reader, it is more important for a heterodox writer to address mainstream critiques than draw the reader’s attention to a vast literature with which she is doubtless familiar.

Nevertheless, in each case, the duty is what I would term ‘emancipatory’; the reader must be *freed* to make her own judgement, and to this end the writer must provide access to the information relevant to that judgement. This is entirely consistent with the liberal democratic concept of ‘informed choice’. Dow rightly informs us that to a choice between one single option and nothing at all is not, in any meaningful sense, a choice. But the injury is multiplied a hundredfold if the reader is compelled to make her choice in total ignorance of the options.

This implies a further duty to present these alternatives ‘fairly’ – in such a way that the audience understands the reasons behind them, which includes their theoretical underpinnings. It follows, as night from day, that the student must be familiar with these underpinnings: she must be equally conversant with Ricardo’s theory of comparative advantage and the theories of uneven development and unequal exchange.

In order to see the relevance of this approach, and rebut the commonplace and, one must say, vulgar and trivial objections that meet this simple idea, let us consider three related alternative solutions which I will call the *fallacy of limited time*, the *fallacy of recognised authority*, and the *fallacy of necessary complexity*. These are all variants of the fallacy of imposed choice, the notion that we can deduce the choice to be made from the fact that it has to be made.⁵

We begin with the ur-fallacy of limited time, as articulated by Samuelson (1987, 52):

Shortly after 1930 economics burst out into new life. At least four revolutions erupted: the monopolistic competition revolution, the Keynesian macro revolution, the mathematicization revolution, and the econometric inference revolution. Graduate students need at least 4 hours a night of sleep: that is a universal constant. So something had to give in the economics curriculum. What gave, and gave out, was History of Thought.

The problem is this: the fact that time is in limited supply tells us nothing about how to use it. One might as well say that because it takes a long time to understand the skeleton, bone doctors should be exempt from studying the pelvis. If an idea is required for mastery of the subject, it should be taught.

In common with all variants of the fallacy of imposed choice, Samuelson's argument makes a problem out of something unproblematic. It ignores the standard curricular solution to the limitations of time, namely progression. That which cannot be absorbed in a 101 course must be taught in a 201 course. There is no reason at all, having selected two or more approaches to fiscal policy, trade theory, monetary theory, the economics of finance, or the theory of agent behaviour, not to teach each approach to an elementary level in year one, an intermediate level in year two, and an advanced level in year three. If things are really that difficult (and we strongly suspect they are not), the profession could require fully trained economists to take extra years in masterships, doctorates, or habilitations, or like doctors or lawyers to take articles in recognised practices before being declared fit to unleash on the public.

All the revolutions in Samuelson's heaven, plus the unaccountably omitted revolutions of input-output analysis, optimal path theory, conjunctural analysis, and planning theory, all originating in Russia in his day, can be taught together with their history, provided one only allows the student to study each at the due level of complexity required of a systematic progression in knowledge and understanding.

This illustrates the fallacy in all limited choice arguments: they claim that when circumstances force us to make a choice, we can work out what to do by the fact of being forced. But choices have to be made on grounds that stand on their own. Even if we don't know the full answer, the correct choice is neither 'what we have always done' nor 'what the authorities recommend' but a method of enquiring into the options in a coherent and consistent way. This is exactly what an ethical approach provides.

It will help to explore some common defences of monotheoretic practice, especially those offered under the mantle of pluralism. Vromen (2007, 72f) deserves especial attention for the unity of purpose involved in conjoining two specious prejudices in a single harmonious trope.

I believe that it is better that students get a solid training in a particular school, tradition, and approach than that they only touch upon, in a rather facile way,