
Foreword

Jack Reardon

Department of Economics,
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire,
467 Schneider Hall, P.O. Box 4004, Eau Claire, WI 54702, USA
Email: jackreardon864@gmail.com

1 Introduction

The *IJPEE* has been privileged to periodically publish important keynote addresses by heterodox/pluralist scholars across the globe. This is an important task of the *IJPEE* connecting ideas at the forefront of today's economics with our readers, thus effectuating a broader platform for dialogue. Asad Zaman continues this tradition¹ with his address, 'Reclaiming our lives and our planet', delivered to the Helsinki Institute of Sustainable Development on 22 April 2021. Asad, currently the Director of the Uloom-ul-Umran, Al-Nafi Online Educational Platform, as well as author of the popular textbook *Statistical Foundations of Econometric Techniques*, and co-editor of the *IJPEE*'s special issue on Islamic Economics² is one of my favourite scholars, dedicated to rethinking and reconceptualising economics, while offering viable and sustainable alternatives to neoclassical economics and economies. In his Helsinki address, he examines some of the critical falling points of Western civilisation while offering a viable and sustainable Islamic-based alternative, hoping to improve communication between East and West. The latter in particular is an important objective of the *IJPEE*, expressed so well by Abdul Azim Islahi,

"due attention should be paid to the contributions of the Muslim scholars ... Coming from Asia and Africa, these voices represent concerns that are different from the European and American ... It is no secret that the East and its religions have always given precedence to equity, social justice, ethics and morality. [...] We should pave the way for exchange and dialogue between the West and the East on an equal footing. Indeed, through dialogue on the basis of tolerance and mutual respect, the shared values become more familiar than those that distinguish and divide." [Islahi³, (2014), pp.100–101]

Asad hopes that his address will enable us to strive together for a better humanity. He writes,

"It is important to understand that Islam is not utopian. We do not expect to be able to create ideal societies, and we do not expect that all will be able to develop their full potentials. It is about the journey not about the destination. Our task is to be engaged in the struggle to create a good society, and to be engaged in the struggle for self-actualization required to realize our potential for excellence."⁴

Scarcity is foundational to neoclassical economics, ostensibly giving it a ticket to scientific status. It also provides the opening fodder for most introductory neoclassical

economics textbooks. It is gratuitously assumed that human wants always and everywhere are greater than the means to satisfy them. Given ubiquitous scarcity, neoclassical economics then extols capitalism as the only economic system able to efficiently allocate scarce resources to satisfy unlimited wants.

But scarcity is an artificial construct created and (often ossified) by human-made institutions. In addition, given changing technology, which is reconceptualising how and where we produce, enabling more stuff to be produced in the commons, it questions the relevancy of a discipline fundamentally based on scarcity [Rifkin, (2014), p.273, and *passim*]. So rather than assume scarcity's ubiquity we must investigate when and why it occurs so we can effectively redress. Panayotakis (2011)⁵, in his article, 'Scarcity or economic insecurity? Two yardsticks for measuring capitalism's performance', argues that economic security⁶ deserves greater attention than scarcity in evaluating any economic system, especially capitalism; and in doing so, will stimulate a greater student interest in economics,

"Closer examination of the relationship between capitalism and economic insecurity can, therefore, highlight the relevance of economics as a discipline. The neoclassical portrayal of capitalism as a system capable of making an efficient use of scarce resources is based on unrealistic assumptions that cannot but lead many students to view economics as an accumulation of pointless mathematical models. Foregrounding the question of economic insecurity, by contrast, can encourage interest in critical economic analysis by demonstrating the possibility of analyzing contemporary economic systems in ways that speak to the experiences and problems students confront in their daily life."

As educators a preponderant goal is to enable our students to think critically – a much needed skill to help solve our myriad crises and as a bona-fide method to improve productivity and enhance employee human capital. Having taught MBA-level managerial economics, critical thinking was a core part of our entire curriculum, the foundation of every course. While critical thinking is in high demand, it unfortunately is in short supply [Nickerson, (2012), p.8]. In their incisive and influential critique of MBA education, Datar et al. (2010, pp.8–9), identified critical thinking as one of eight unmet needs. But what exactly is critical thinking and how can it be used in economics? Nickerson (2012, p.7), after acknowledging the "many and varied definitions for critical thinking," offers a helpful answer to the first question, telling us that critical thinking,

"invokes individual and collective processes to advance the likelihood that individuals compressively formulate problems, issues, and opportunities and address appropriate issues and develop inferences, answers, or problem solutions that are creative, well-reasoned, and useful. It also involves elements of thought, thinking standards, and a disposition that encourages reflection, learning, and improvement."

Daniel Friesner and Donald D. Hackney, in their paper, 'Critical thinking, curriculum mapping, and economic education: an essay', sift through the vast literature on critical thinking bringing it home for economists. Focusing on the dimensions of critical thinking (logical reasoning, critical thought, and critique/meta-criticism) will influence our understanding of economic phenomena, and also the framework of our pedagogy.⁷ The authors conclude their paper with a clarion call for the economics profession to,

"create curriculum maps describing the interrelationships between critical thinking (as a foundational skill set) and economics. Doing so will allow economists to identify and remediate gaps in the depth or breadth of students'

critical thinking skills as they are used in economics. It will also allow economics instructors to more effectively convey economic concepts to students in the classroom and promote greater understanding and appreciation for different schools of economic thought.”

I am happy to report that we will be publishing one such curriculum mapping in the next issue of the *IJPEE* (Vol. 12, No. 3).

One of the benefits of studying the history of thought of any discipline, and especially that of economics, is to see how one’s discipline developed, and the roads not taken, which can often be as important as the road taken (Hunt and Lautzenheiser, 2011). And in economics, one such not-taken road is that of ethics, despite Adam Smith’s monumental *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (2000 [1759]), which could have and should have sent economics on a very different path to become intertwined with particle physics, cubism, and plurality, all conveniently parried by today’s neoclassical economics (Boyd and Reardon, 2020). But as we transition toward a sustainable economy (a transition that must happen sooner than later), one that keeps the global temperature from rising more than 1.5 C and is adequately able to provision for all, then ethics must return and become foundational in all of economics.

Finn Olesen, in his paper, ‘Macroeconomics must have an ethical foundation’ offers a cogent and readable rationale of restoring ethics. He writes,

“a moral dimension should be included in both micro- and macroeconomics. So, for example, environmental sustainability in the longer run includes generational considerations bedrocked by fundamental moral dimensions – how much weight should we as the present generation put on future generations’ happiness and their ability to live a prosperous life? In addition, how should we in practise try to solve this complex question when we must decide how to distribute the efforts needed to achieve this among individuals in a way that respects certain principles of equality?”

A problem in moving towards sustainability is surmounting formidable obstacles, both substantive and ideological that stand in our way. In his paper, ‘Misconceptions within neoclassical economics and their possible causes’, Tunç Ali Kütükçüoğlu, creates a taxonomic framework which will help us better conceptualise and overcome the ideological barriers to sustainability ensconced in neoclassical economics. He asks and succinctly answers the following questions: What kind of education do we need to understand the principles of a sustainable community? What barriers must be surmounted to understand sustainability? And, why are they still maintained despite contrary evidence? What kind of education do we need to overcome these barriers? How can we develop mental immunity against such barriers?

Is another financial crisis inevitable? L. Randall Wray in his new book *A Great Leap Forward – Heterodox Economic Policy for the 21st Century* thinks so.⁸ Our reviewer Dirk Ehnts, enthusiastically endorses this important book calling it a ‘tour de force,’

“It sets out a vision of the policies needed to bring back full employment and price stability to the US economy, together with a sustainable use of resources as envisioned by the Green New Deal. [It] does a good job explaining in plain English how we have arrived where we are, why we need to change course and where we need to go.”

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Notes

- 1 See Peterson (2011), van Staveren (2011), Chester (2017), and van Staveren (2020).
- 2 See *IJPEE* Vol. 6, No. 4, and *IJPEE* Vol. 8, No. 1.
- 3 For a review of Islahi's book, see Reardon (2015).
- 4 In our special issue on Islamic economics (see footnote #1), we reached a similar conclusion: "Certainly this does not imply that Islamic economics has all the answers – no view does – only that we need to dialogue, listen and learn from all disciplines within economics" (Zaman and Reardon, 2015, p.321].
- 5 An expert on scarcity, he has published in a wide variety of outlets. See Panayotakis (2011, 2012) for a good exposition of his work.
- 6 Panayotakis refers to economic insecurity as "the constant specter, within capitalism, of a seriously adverse change in the economic position of different economic actors, including individuals, households, and capitalist businesses."
- 7 While publishing articles to enhance and foster critical skills, e.g., Underwood (2017), the *IJPEE* also publishes articles that go beyond critical thinking to involve critical action, e.g., Blackwell and Dehler (2014), teaching them to think critically in analysing classroom material and to frame action critically with the intention of fostering social change.
- 8 Wray is by no means alone. Keen (2017) writes, "We also need to accept that capitalism would have financial crises even if all lending were entirely responsible...we cannot avoid financial crises...because the economic prerequisites of excessive private debt and excessive reliance on credit have already been set" (p.122, and p.128).