

Death of the Pedagogue: Pluralism and Non-didacticism

Watson Duncan¹, **Arico** Fabio¹, **Cook** Steve², **Parker** Louise¹, ¹University of East Anglia, UK, ²Swansea University, UK

As described purposely by Denis (2009, 7), Economics is a discipline that is comprised of “*not one but many sciences of economics*”. Economists do not think alike. There are multiple schools of thought, regularly producing inconsistent stories as explanation for economic phenomena. The student therefore should realise that economics cannot be understood through the adoption of one perspective. It is by comparing and contrasting various economic schools of thought, whilst engaging with related disciplines in the social sciences, that economists can be creative in their enquiry. Given this, there is no justification to teach economics as if a consensus exists. Such an assumption would seemingly serve no purpose and result only in the student being deprived of the rich debate within the discipline. In short, a pluralist teaching approach- whereby the instructor and learner consider the different ways of understanding economic phenomena- is seen as the natural outcome which all economics education should pursue.

We therefore have to ask why, given these apparent advantages, the debate between monism and pluralism is still on-going? Neoclassical economics continues to dominate undergraduate curricula and pluralist techniques are often relegated to specific sub-disciplines such as labour economics. For some, this reflects constraints imposed on the higher education sector. Wilson and Dixon (2009, 98), for example, highlight the consequences of the targeting of research:

“The targeting of research...made a more liberal, pluralistic approach to the provision of undergraduate economics seem to many in the academy a luxury that could no longer be afforded.”

Pedagogical developments, according to this viewpoint, are driven by simple concerns over opportunity costs. With research central to the academic's career progression, there is an incentive to adopt a less sophisticated programme design with core orthodox curricula reiterated again and again through-out individual module provision. This approach is often preferred by academics that prioritise concise formal representation through mathematical formulae, as they frequently seek the most convenient avenue to minimise learning and teaching workloads.

In contrast, rather than referring to the evolution of economics as a result of general higher education developments, we could highlight the characteristics of the individual academic. Freeman (2009, 24) notes that, for economics, "*pluralism has been misrepresented as a synonym for heterodoxy*". How can we explain this misleading tendency to blur the definition of two distinct terms? Are there perhaps characteristics specific to Economics that could encourage this limitation of pluralist methods? This paper offers an insight into such imprecision by inspecting the discipline through the lens of Foucault and Barthes. It posits that it is the pursuit of an inadequate and obsolete economic pedagogy that has limited the delivery of pluralism. We will show that the notion of a 'pluralist pedagogue' is a paradox, representing a contradiction in terms. With the pedagogue representing the old-fashioned, out-dated teacher, the development of pluralism is innately restricted. For it to evolve fully requires a fundamental shift in the relationship between academic and student. The instructor must cede his hierarchical position and become the enlightened navigator. In the next section we defend this position. This is then succeeded by two case studies offered with two purposes in mind: to elaborate on the specific characteristics presented by a pluralist economic education and to illustrate what is meant by an enlightened navigator. Innovative assessment

should be placed at the heart of a successfully pluralist education, removing the emphasis placed on the 'teacher' onto the students themselves.

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