

Concealed Ideologies: A PAE View of Ideology in Economics

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Introduction

This paper's focus on the nature of conceptual systems is largely eccentric in the context of the literature on ideology in economics. Furthermore some readers will find its non-traditional conclusions uncongenial. Traditionally, modern analyses of the connections between economics and ideology emphasize the role played by value judgments of various kinds, be they intentional or not. Although this paper does not take issue with that approach, it argues that ideology in economics in the main *consists not of the theories themselves, but rather in the way that they are presented*. This transfers the ethical responsibility from the theoretician to the textbook writer and the teacher, a transference to which, as the French Post-Autistic Economics students found, there is stiff resistance.

The argument's barebones look like this. A conceptual system defines, at the exclusion of others, a point of view toward its object of enquiry. For the human sciences this fact poses a moral danger. Their conceptual systems relate to their objects of enquiry in two ways that invite them to play an ideological function as well as an epistemological one. Both of these relations are recursive. First, a social-science conceptual system can alter the objects of its enquiry by becoming part of the conceptual and belief apparatus through which humans define themselves, perceive others and make choices, thereby changing the structures and propensities of the human world. With the spread of mass higher education, this recursive phenomena becomes more common, pervasive and profound. Second, unlike the natural sciences, the human sciences are ultimately a means from on high of preserving or reconstructing the basic realities that they study, these in total being the human project. Different conceptual systems present different sets of choices, real or imagined, to be chosen and acted upon by human populations at large. It can never be the case that each of these sets of choices will equally favour every group in society.

This means that, regardless of value judgments, it is the nature of all social theorizing, economics being no exception, to favour some groups in society over others, so that any attempt to block enquiry and analysis from multiple theoretical perspectives, i.e., anti-pluralism, is an ideological move. To understand how this favouring comes about, regardless of the intentions of the economist, it is necessary to be aware of how every conceptual framework functions as a limited point of view. Grasping this complex fact is crucial to understanding the presence of ideology in economics and to how to combat it. So first I am going to survey some of the general ways in which conceptual frameworks differ, whatever their subject matter. Next I will show the part these differences play in the advancement of knowledge, but how in the social sciences they can become the basis of *concealed ideologies*. Then comes an explanation of how this relates to the Post-Autistic Economics (PAE) movement. There follows a section explaining the difference between the ideologically driven fake pluralism found in economics and the real pluralism that created contemporary physics and biology. (Understanding this difference is fundamental to understanding the ideological problem in economics and what it means for the advancement of knowledge.) The centrality of teaching to ideology in economics, means that pedagogic *techniques* are a primary means by which ideology appears in economics. So I will offer a brief look at some techniques employed by economics textbook writers to ideologically indoctrinate rather than educate their readers, followed by an illustration of the opposite approach and a few observations on the nature of the opposition to the Post-Autistic Economics movement's attempt to curtail ideology in economics through pluralist reform.

Conceptual Frameworks as Points of View

All representations, be they maps, stories, systems of equations, charts, pictures or theories with special vocabularies, come into being on the basis of a simplification of reality. The Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges illustrated the folly of believing otherwise with a parable "Of Exactitude in Science"

In that Empire, the craft of Cartography attained such Perfection that the Map of a Single province covered the space of an entire City, and the Map of the Empire itself an entire Province. In the course of Time, these Extensive maps were found somehow wanting, and so the College of Cartographers evolved a Map of the Empire that was of the same Scale as the Empire and coincided with it point for point. Less attentive to the Study of Cartography, succeeding Generations came to judge a map of such Magnitude cumbersome, and, not without Irreverence, they abandoned it to the Rigours of Sun and Rain. In the western Deserts, tattered Fragments of the Map are still to be found, Sheltering an occasional Beast or Beggar; in the whole Nation, no other relic is left of the Discipline of Geography. [Borges 1975, p. 131]

Another literary figure, Henry James, expressed the necessity of simplification as follows: "[E]xperience has to organize some system of observation – for fear of, in the immensity, of losing its way." [James 1962, p. 3] In the sciences we call these systems "conceptual frameworks" or "conceptual systems". With their special vocabularies, they designate certain features of a domain for attention while ignoring others. They intentionally block from view most of the detail and dimensions of the domain so as to highlight those that a group of people have decided are of special interest to them. This means that different theories pertaining to the same domain can be put forward, *not in the sense of being contradictory, but rather in the sense of being complementary by giving prominence to and thereby illuminating different dimensions of that domain*. Each theory functions as an interpretative system, as a special and limited way of looking at some part of reality, providing a particular point of view, like when one looks at a sculpture from a particular angle, or when a cartographer creates a road map, omitting footpaths, topography, environmental features, population density, tourist attractions, etc..

A conceptual system includes a classification of entities in its domain, which defines the categories of thought permitted under the theory. It also, because "*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world*" [Wittgenstein 1974, 5.6], circumscribes the theory's perceptual field within its domain. An anecdote of Thomas Kuhn illustrates this point. A "distinguished physicist and an eminent chemist" were asked whether a single atom of helium was or was not a molecule.

Both answered without hesitation, but their answers were not the same. For the chemist the atom of helium was a molecule because it behaved like one with respect to the kinetic theory of gases. For the physicist, on the other hand, the helium atom was not a molecule because it displayed no molecular spectrum. Presumably both men were talking of the same particle, but they were viewing it through their own research training and practice. Undoubtedly their experiences had had much in common, but they did not, in this case, tell the two specialists the same thing. [Kuhn 1970, pp. 50-1]

If different conceptual systems lead to such diverse judgements on something so simple as an atom, think what can happen with something so complex as an economy.

The classification of entities also requires a definition of their properties or, in non-idealist terms, a decision about which of an entity's many properties are going to be taken into account and which are not. Thus classical mechanics when considering material substance includes the properties of mass and length but not the symmetrical properties of crystals or the colligative properties of solutions. And when neoclassical economics' defines a product's market demand as an additive function of individual demands it conceives of individual demands as exclusively intrasubjective,

whereas the French intersubjectivists emphasize the role of interpersonal effects in market situations and their non-linear influence on market outcomes.

Conceptual frameworks also contain notions about how the things they classify and describe are connected. As David Hume noted, "the most usual species of connection among the different events which enter into any narrative composition is that of cause and effect." [Hume (1748) 1955, p. 34] Identification of causal linkages shows things leading to other things, giving shape to series of events, allowing us to comprehend various things as contributing to or forming a system of parts. But cause and effect linkages come in numerous forms and so provide another source of differences between theories and between their conceptual systems and thus another way by which they may bring into view different aspects of reality.

Some conceptual systems are closed in the sense that they regard all events as predetermined and others are open in the sense that they allow indeterminacies. Classical mechanics and neoclassical economics illustrate the first type, and which for centuries was the only type. The popes prohibited heliocentric cosmology; the scientific community had no time for theorizing about indeterminate phenomena. The doctrine of scientific determinism remained the standard assumption of science until the end of the nineteenth century. In the popular imagination and in the minds of physicists, quantum mechanics is usually thought of as the breakthrough for creating open theories and ending the determinist hegemony, but evolutionary theory from Wallace (1858) and Darwin (1859) onwards relied heavily on indeterminacies (genetic recombination, random mutational jumps, environmental changes) as explanatory linkages in addition to its determinate ones.

Another conceptual dividing line between theories is whether or not they allow internal as well as external causal relations. Some conceptual systems are mechanistic, like classical mechanics and neoclassical economics, in the sense that they see the primary entities connected only by relationships that leave their identities unchanged. Others take an organic approach, most notably modern evolutionary biology which focuses on how the identity of biology's primary units change through interaction. Similarly, Adam Smith emphasized the importance of internal relations in determining economic outcomes. For example, when explaining his "principle of division of labour", he wrote:

The difference of natural talents in different men is, in reality, much less than we are aware of; and the very different genius which appears to distinguish men of different professions, when grown up to maturity, is not upon many occasions so much the cause as the effect of the division of labour. [Smith, 1776, Book One, Chapter III. (Smith 1979, p. 120)]

Still another conceptual dividing line between theories is whether or not they allow structural properties as well as aggregative ones. For example, all properties found in classical mechanics are based on a combination of three primary properties, mass, length and time, with each of these described by an additive function, so that, for example, an object's mass is merely the aggregate of the masses of its parts. But not all reality is so simple. Many properties come into being through the structures by which things are combined, for example, the property of being able to think.

Finally, theories divide over how they conceptualise the direction of causal linkages. Reality presents a range of complexity running between atomistic individuals and the universe. This polarity entails three possible choices for theoreticians. They can devise a conceptual framework that "sees" only causes running from the simple to the more complex, "micro-explanation", or one that admits only the opposite, "macro-explanation", or one that admits both. Because Newton's physics used only micro-explanation and because chemistry was so successful at decomposing compound substances into simpler ones and eventually into their elements, this unidirectional format dominated science for centuries. Again Darwin and Wallace were pivotal figures in opening science's eyes to causal linkages running in the other direction. Like air travel, this causal complexity is not to everyone's taste. Many would pay dearly for reality to be simpler. But

only religious fundamentalists fail to see that environments influence the formation of species, and only methodological fanatics doubt that it was the society in which they grew up, rather than their individual makeup, that caused them to speak language X instead of some other. And physics long ago, with the advent of quantum mechanics, saw the light and took up the challenge. Indeed, notes the physicist Paul Davies, the quantum factor “denies that the world can be understood in terms of its components alone.” Davies continues:

the reality of the subatomic particle cannot be untangled from the environment it inhabits . . . Evidently the macroscopic and the microscopic worlds are intimately interwoven. There is no hope of building a full understanding of matter from the constituent particles alone. Only the system as a *whole* gives concrete expression to microscopic reality. The big and the small co-exist. One does not subsume wholly the other, nor does the other wholly 'explain' the one. [Davies 1995, p. 39]

Could something similar be true of the economic realm?

I have felt it necessary to survey and articulate these limitations of and differences between conceptual systems for two reasons. First, to dispel the belief, more common than one might think, that it is possible when conceptualizing a topic to offer God's point of view in the sense of encompassing all points of view and thereby being objective and neutral. Second, to show that *the absence of objectivity is not so much a matter of what is said as it is of what is not permitted to be said*. If, for example, three conceptual systems reveal different aspects of X, but the communication of only one is permitted, then, regardless of the favoured theory's virtues, objectivity regarding X is absent.

The Epistemological and Ideological Dimensions of Conceptual Frameworks

Since Napoleon's popularisation of “ideology” in a derogative sense, many commentators have attached various meanings to the word, meanings inspired partly by shifting historical and social contexts, partly by a desire to make the phenomenon intelligible from more than one conceptual viewpoint and partly also, of course, by ideology. But the common presumption of these formulations has been that an ideology is necessarily manufactured and/or disseminated, consciously or unconsciously, with an ideological end in mind. The presumption of intent holds not only for the concept as developed in the negative sense by Marxist and non-Marxist writers, but also for Mannheim's neutralized concept which identifies ideology as a distinct type of cultural formation, functionally indispensable in non-traditional societies. But the preceding taxonomy of differences in conceptual systems shows that the element of intent is not a necessary condition for an economic theory to function as an ideology. Each conceptual system for a given human field necessarily offers a different viewpoint of that field, and thereby suggests different possibilities for shaping, directing and organizing it. Consequently, if for whatever reasons, one conceptual system's partial view is made the only view on offer, its influence on shaping human experience in a particular direction will be no less than if it had been designed to do so. *Where there exist a plurality of conceptual systems that illuminate different dimensions of a social object but the teaching of only one system is permitted, that system functions as an ideology.*

One must be careful here not to fall into a logical hole. Because every possible conceptual system can view its social object only from a particular point of view, it is self-defeating to equate ideology with systematized bias vis-à-vis the social realm, lest the social sciences are to be regarded as but a subcategory of ideology. The test of whether or not an economic theory is ideological is not its essence nor how and through whom it came to be nor who uses it. Instead the test is *how* it is used. A knife can be a deadly weapon or a tool for preparing the family dinner. Likewise an approach to economics can be an exercise in ideology or a tool for the advancement of understanding. A conceptual system regarding human affairs becomes an ideology when its partisans refuse to countenance the use of other systems as well, as when a group of economists refuse to teach their students how to view the economic realm from conceptual points of view other than the one that they favour. It is important to note here how the epistemological and ideological dimensions relate. *An economic theory becomes an ideology*

precisely at that moment when its partisans decide to curb the growth and prevent the dissemination of knowledge of how to see all those aspects of the economy that their approach leaves in the dark. In economics ideology comes about mostly through the way it is taught, so that the primary agents of ideology in economics are not theorists and technical practitioners, but rather the teachers and, most especially, the authors of textbooks.

The Post-Autistic Economics Movement vis-à-vis Ideology

An analysis similar to this is implicit in the French economics students petition that gave birth to the Post-Autistic Economics movement:

Out of all the approaches to economic questions that exist, generally only one is presented to us. This approach is supposed to explain everything by means of a purely axiomatic process, as if this were THE economic truth. We do not accept this dogmatism. We want a pluralism of approaches, adapted to the complexity of the objects and to the uncertainty surrounding most of the big questions in economics (unemployment, inequalities, the place of financial markets, the advantages and disadvantages of free-trade, globalization, economic development, etc.) [French Students 2000]

This is a call for two things, the realization of each being necessary for the realization of the other: an end to the ideological pretense of there being only one right way of looking at a major part of the human world, and an opening of doors to the knowledge and understanding of the economic realm that comes from taking other theoretical perspectives. It is important to note that the students are not asking for the banishment of neoclassical economics in its epistemological function, only the end of its deployment as an enforced (every student wants a good mark) ideology. Their demand is that their economics education be oriented primarily toward understanding the world's economic problems (globalization, inequalities, environment, technical progress, etc.), so any school's teaching would be welcome to the extent that it threw light on the real world. Furthermore, the inclusion of different "schools", with their different conceptual viewpoints, would neutralize the ideological implications that every conceptual system in economics contains. It is this insistence upon pluralism as a means combating ideology in economics that, even more than its stand against excessive formalism, that has been the primary thrust of the PAE movement and inspires the most virulent reactions. Although the history of economics is diverse, the idea of pluralism has in the main been anathema to economists. Beginning with the Physiocrats in the mid eighteenth-century, economists of all varieties have been inclined to believe that their approach to economic phenomena reveals, if not the whole truth, at least all of it that is worth knowing, so that, rhetoric aside, e.g. "positive economics", *the ideological approach to the discipline has rarely failed to prevail.* If the French students' demands were generally met, it would be the biggest revolution that economics has seen.

It also has been observed by PAE economists that when one variety of economics has a classroom monopoly, democracy is undermined. Peter Söderbaum explains it as follows:

The 'fact' that also ideology is present means that the 'one-paradigm position' at departments of economics becomes untenable. Limiting economics to one paradigm means that one ideological orientation is emphasized at the expense of all others. This position is not compatible with normal ideas of democracy. Departments of economics should avoid the role of being political propaganda centres. With more than one paradigm as part of a pluralistic strategy, the ideological diversity in a democratic society will be better reflected. Furthermore, one specific paradigm, such as the neoclassical one, may perform well in relation to some fields of study while being more of a problem in relation to other fields. [Söderbaum 2004, 159]

Fake Pluralism versus Real Pluralism

As a means of fending off criticism of its autism, of further concealing its ideological role, of diverting calls for pluralism and, perhaps most of all, just as a pastime, the neoclassical

mainstream plays a game of relaxing the assumptions. It loosens one or two assumptions around the edges of the theory and then does a bit of analysis. This is no better than when viewing a sculpture to lean to the left or to the right or kneel or stand tiptoed as a means of seeing another side of the work. It is like the person who, fearing travel, substitutes for the experience of going to India the experience of eating chicken tika masala while wearing a sari or a Nehru jacket and listening to a Ravi Shankar CD. Yet the whole mainstream project is now so infected with this methodological dilettantism that it seems necessary to spell out the difference between fake and real pluralism.

Even more than with a word, the meaning of a concept is its use. The meaning of a word depends upon the referent of the sentence, which as Wittgenstein noted is a "state of affairs" [*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 2.01, 2.001, 2.02,]; likewise the meaning of a concept depends on the framework in which it appears. For example, take something so simple and straightforward as the concept of economic growth defined in terms of GNP. When you transfer this concept from the neoclassical framework which views the economy as a closed system that includes the ecosystem ("land, labour and capital") to the conceptual framework of ecological economics which views the economy as an open subsystem of the ecosystem, this concept's meaning, in all its dimensions, changes fundamentally. It also changes fundamentally when transferred from the masculinist neoclassical framework to a feminist economics that ascribes economic value to production not entering into market relations, for example family-provided nursing and child care. Each of these three conceptual frameworks, having the limited point of view common to all such creations, identify and describe a different "state of affairs". These examples illustrate two necessities: one must think from *inside* a conceptual system in order to grasp the meaning of its concepts and to gain the vantage point that it offers on the world, and economics students must be introduced to more than one conceptual system if they are not to be ideologically trapped within it.

Ultimately there also is a huge epistemological price that humankind pays when economics is pursued ideologically. Think what would *not* have happened in twentieth-century physics if it had behaved like economics and refused pluralism. "Today" says the physicist Stephen Hawking, "scientists describe the universe in terms of two basic partial theories - the general theory of relativity and quantum mechanics. They are the great intellectual achievements of the first half of this century." [Hawking 1995, p. 13] They are also two theories whose conceptual frameworks differ fundamentally, *whose basic concepts directly contradict each other*. [Bohm 1983, p. 176]

General relativity conceives of space and time as continuous; quantum theory conceives of them as discontinuous.

General relativity conceives of matter as particulate; quantum theory conceives of it as a wave-particle duality.

General relativity conceives of physical objects as having actual properties; quantum theory describes them as having only potential properties within the given physical situation.

General relativity conceives all physical reality as determinate and all events as in principle having a causal explanation; quantum theory admits indeterminacy and events incapable of causal explanation.

One would be hard pressed to imagine conceptual differences greater than these. And that is their power. By offering radically different vantage points they reveal different primary dimensions of the physical world. The physicist David Bohm explains the pluralist case as follows.

One may indeed compare a theory to a particular view of some object. Each view gives only an appearance of the object in some aspect. The whole object is not perceived in any one view but, rather, it is grasped only *implicitly* as that single reality which is shown in all these views. [Bohm 1983, p. 8]

Unlike most economists, physicists want to see their domain from more than one point of view and to celebrate the knowledge and understanding that results.

Think what would *not* have happened in twentieth-century biology if it had refused pluralism. Modern evolutionary biology consists of a family of theories which take different units as *primary*, as the ones that survive or become extinct. These include genes, fragments of genes, chromosomes, genotypes, phenotypes, groups of organisms, gene pools and species. This assortment of formulations provides the biologist with a range of different points of view on the selection process. Modern biology also shifts, as suits the dimension being investigated, between different concepts of species, “biological” and “phylogenetic”. They even shift between theories that have species as their basic unit of classification and theories that use niche. [Dupré 1993, pp. 37-59]

With all this deep conceptual divergence in physics and biology the question of orthodoxy and unorthodoxy does not arise. How can this be possible when in economics it is treated as the most important question. I believe the answer is partly because physicists and biologists are driven by a passion for understanding to a degree that is uncommon among us, and this keeps them from blocking the many paths that can lead to it. But perhaps more important is that they do not have the ideology problem

Textbooks as Ideological Instruments

Although the ideological nature of most introductory level economics textbooks is discretely concealed (and remains a taboo topic), a little textual analysis quickly brings it bubbling to the surface. The techniques by which the student’s thought processes are gradually collared by monist and hence ideological texts are fairly standardized, as they have been honed by successive generations of textbook writers. In the main these techniques are linguistic and centred on the choice and development of the primary terminology.

Neoclassical economics, especially in the last fifty years, has made a point of raising its flag over hallowed words from the general culture like “rationality”, “choice”, “freedom”, “equity” and “efficiency”. These vague but worshipped abstract nouns, whose meanings change with the wind, are bottom-heavy with emotion and float like icebergs through public discussion. By labelling their key concepts with these words, economics textbook writers emotionalise their presentations and, as I will explain, confuse and bully their mostly teenage readers.

For example, consider how *Principles of Microeconomics* by Maikiw et. al. (1999) introduces “efficiency”, “equity” and “rationality”. The opening chapter’s title, “Ten Principles of Economics”, appears under an almost halo-shaped illustration evocative of religious art. On its third page [p. 5], set off in a wide empty margin and opposite where the text says that society faces a trade-off “between efficiency and equity” one finds:

efficiency

the property of society getting the most it can from scarce resources

equity

the property of distributing economic prosperity fairly among the members of society

At best two students in a hundred will notice that these “definitions” are gems of question begging: “the most” of what and “fairly” meaning what? Nothing of substance has been broached. Instead what is happening is that student is being taught to use these words as placeholders, so that gradually and almost imperceptibly they can be filled with neoclassical meaning as the student progresses through the text, lectures, quizzes and exams of the course. Because students begin their study of economics with strong, positive, perhaps even passionate feelings for symbols like “efficiency”, “equity”, “freedom” and “rationality”, once they have

inculcated exclusively the meanings given to these symbols by neoclassical economics, they will in effect be ideological converts.

All this will be done without a single mention, let alone discussion, of ethical lenses other than Utilitarianism through which one might view economic reality. The students will not even be told that they are being introduced into an ethical system of thought, as that could derail the indoctrination process.¹

Mankiw et. al. deploy a different tactic, bullying, with their introduction of “rational”:

PRINCIPLE #3: Rational People Think at the Margin [p. 6]

The authors explain that by thinking at the margin they mean “by comparing marginal costs and marginal benefits”. Why is this bullying? The student, as the authors must know, will not read that as meaning “We are going to define ‘rational people’ as those people who think at the margin.” The student will read it not as a definition but as a statement of fact. Most likely the student will not even know that rationality is a normative concept. Nor is the student apt to have any general views to offer in opposition. But what students will have, especially the nineteen-year-olds, is a compelling desire to be regarded both by themselves and by others, most especially by their teacher, as “rational”, whatever the word means. I don’t mind telling anyone that I don’t think at the margin, but the student, and rightly so, will fear the consequences of putting him or herself forward as “irrational”.

Even if “rationality” is taken in the narrow sense of referring to the adjustment of means to ends, it does not begin to escape its status as a normative concept because different people, depending on the forms of ethics to which they subscribe, will have different notions about what one’s ends are or should be. Unfortunately, among economists the obvious needs to be emphasized: not everyone is a Utilitarian. Not everyone believes that the maximization of individual “utility”, whatever that might be, is or should be the goal of human and hence economic life. “Economists have no right to select one ethics as the ‘correct one’ for purposes of economic analysis.” [Söderbaum, 2003, p. 162] But in the main they do, and in doing so they eschew science in favour of ideology.

If economics textbook authors placed education ahead of indoctrination, the epistemological role of their theory ahead of its ideological one, how might they proceed? Hugh Stretton’s *Economics: A New Introduction* [1999] shows how it can be done. For example, look at how he introduces “efficiency”.

If you measure efficiency by more than one criterion, you have to decide how much weight to give to each of the criteria. The facts can’t do that for you. It takes a value judgment, and that value judgment will be built into your measure of efficiency.

Earlier, you read this: ‘Common sense says it is efficient to get a given output from the least input.’ But what does ‘least input’ mean? Does it mean least raw materials? Least work? Least expenditure? You have to decide. [p. 48]

A little further on, after addressing non-dogmatically the vexed questions “Efficient at what?” and “Efficient for whom?”, Stretton tells the student:

Most tests of efficiency require some value judgments. They can be made into objective tests by precise specifications: output of *what* per input of *what*. But that merely shifts the conflicts of interest and the necessary value judgments from the conduct of the test to the choice and design of the test.

This principle applies to judgments of many other things besides efficiency. [p.49]

These passages characterize the approach throughout Stretton’s book and which could and should be the approach of every economics textbook, one which treats economics in the pluralistic, non-ideological way that the French students have asked for, which instead of slyly trying to indoctrinate the young is committed to educating them in the deepest possible sense.

The PAE movement, with the important exception that it believes that economics should not be conducted in a manner that subverts the democratic process, is apolitical. But its campaign *to orient economics away from ideology by treating different conceptual systems as sets of tools rather than as systems of belief* is a direct challenge to the institutionalized status quo. Thus at times it finds itself the target of abuse and distortion. One tactic, reminiscent of the McCarthyism of the 1950s, is to label it as leftist. As editor of the *post-autistic economics review* I do not check out contributors' politics. But I do know that it has had contributions from the whole gamut of schools and sub-schools of economics, including Institutional, Post-Keynesian, Intersubjectivist, Austrian, Marxian, Anthropological, Ecological, Behaviouralist and Feminist, as well as systems analysts and libertarians of the left, centre and right varieties – even economists who are primarily neoclassicalists but who are also pluralists.

As Galbraith-senior once observed, economics is mainly a teaching profession. Inevitably this makes textbooks, most especially introductory level textbooks, the profession's primary "institutions" and their authors the profession's highest paid members, their annual royalties often being multiples of their annual salary. One would expect -- and here, alas, neoclassical reasoning and ethics pertains -- to find some of these people on the frontline, fighting PAE so as to defend the ideological monopoly that underwrites their wealth, security and prestige.

Conclusion

Economists of all varieties must, like physicists and biologists have done, learn to live without the belief that there is one right way of describing and explaining reality. Natural scientists have found it worthwhile to accept this existential burden for purely epistemological reasons. For economists there is, if they are of a democratic persuasion, an additional reason because economics as a discipline impacts on the object of its enquiry. Because each approach looks at the economic from a particular conceptual angle, different approaches will, *if presented to the public as if it were "THE economic truth"*, promote the interests of some groups in society over others, encourage and discourage in individuals different types of behaviour, illuminate or leave in the dark different problems and possibilities for humankind, and etc.. In other words, when economic theories are handled in this way they function primarily not as sets of tools for human enlightenment, but, to the contrary, as *concealed ideologies*, which, when one wins out over the rest, smother real discussion, silence debate, blind the public to most of economic reality, and ultimately place the human project at risk.

Endnote

1. The words "ethics" and "ethical" do not even appear in the index of Mankiw et. al..

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