

Beyond indifference: An economics for the future

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Introduction

Pressing arguments for a paradigm shift in economics – based on an assessment of mainstream economics and its shortcomings – are out there for quite a while now. The emperor has been declared long dead in intellectual terms (Keen, 2001), but it is still firmly alive institutionally. This is the only reason why we still have to talk about it at all. Having said this, it goes without saying that the “intellectual monoculture” (Graupe, 2015) in economics as documented in bibliometric (Glötzl and Aigner, 2019) or network analyses (Ötsch, Pühringer, and Hirte, 2018) is not a matter of intellectual superiority (Fourcade, Ollion and Algan, 2015), but one of institutional power (Maeße et al., 2021). And this is one of the most important points, where neoliberalism firmly intersects with the discipline of economics. For the neoliberal thought collective (Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009) has contributed in significant terms to the institutional stabilization of a specific kind of economic thinking, regardless of its adequacy to empirical phenomena and the needs of all stakeholders involved in economies around the globe. But economics has never developed into a synonym for neoliberalism. Over the course of the second half of the 20th century up to today, there has been an ongoing struggle against the discipline’s occupation. This struggle is possibly getting closer to a moment of decision. A “Great Mindshift” (Göpel, 2016), overcoming a fundamentally unsustainable paradigm, could be imminent: both in economics as in society. From the discipline’s historical genesis of the last 100 years, we can learn that any paradigm shift in economics will not just have to outline a different way of thinking, but the practical and institutional conditions of possibility to provide these innovations academic as well as extra-academic air to come and stay alive. The quest for a post-neoliberal economics is not just an intellectual, but a fundamentally institutional one.

If this is the challenge, I propose to use the spaces critical economists have been able to gain or maintain for a pragmatic and transformative discourse on the (economic) challenges the global society is facing in the 21st century. Let us turn the page and switch from critiques of the soon-to-be-past to the intellectual and practical co-creation of economic futures worth living in. Let us overcome the discipline’s fundamental indifference towards an ever-changing world full of pressing issues and start caring for them. In this vein it proves to be a promising sign that there is a growing network in societies around the globe eager for concrete proposals aiming at a fundamental reconfiguration of economic processes (Fridays for Future 2021; Together for Future 2021). Both aspects of the specific historic moment we are living through – escalating socio-ecological crises and a public increasingly understanding the need for fundamental economic transformation – should encourage us to foster a new self-confident economic discourse and its institutionalization; a discourse that invites all sorts of players with all kinds of academic and extra-academic backgrounds and affiliations willing to join the actual game to come along. Having contributed in building a new university from scratch along with fellow colleagues, I have strong reason to believe that there will be a path for new academic and economic realities – if we just walk it.

Figure 1



Photo Credit: Speak Your Mind // Julian Koschorke

The following pages are a proposal meant to participate in this discussion – it is not intended as a last word to end all theoretical, epistemological or institutional discussions once and for all. Actually, the illusion of last words in economic reasoning is the first thing to overcome on the way to a new economic paradigm.

The epistemological meaning of “There is no planet B”

The most powerful and at the same time dangerous aspect of neoliberal thought is its conception of economic reality as governed by a separate sphere of absolute truths. In aligning with a long-standing tradition of perennial philosophies (lat. *perennis*: constant, lasting), neoliberalism has set out to reconfigure our world according to an image that was dead from the very outset. The myth neoliberalism is operating on philosophically is the idea of a world of hidden truths and principles behind the ambiguous and chaotic phenomena we are experiencing in daily life. There is a logic behind the chaos, reigning independently of time and space. This proposition is not just “talk” – it is a deep-seated ontological frame of contemporary economic thought that has found its way into the discipline’s textbooks and, hence, has to be learnt by millions of students around the globe semester after semester (i.e. in Mankiw, 2021, 2ff.). “Stop engaging with reality and start thinking about economic laws working behind the curtains” is what students face but a lot of them intuitively reject (Pühringer and Bäuerle, 2019).

The power of neoliberal thought, then, lies with conquering the public imagination through institutionalized impact and installing the fixed imagery of a narrowly interpreted “Market Mechanism” working miraculously backstage in the theatre of social reality. For the talk of “The Market” is the specific figure, neoliberals have chosen to install on the speculative second stage. This figure – though invisible for the lay spectator – is nevertheless said to subliminally determine the play on the frontstage of reality just as natural laws do. Against the manifold claims of economic thought to finally have reached a “scientific” stage, we have witnessed a deep mystification of social reality emanating from its partial marriage with neoliberalism (Ötsch, 2019; Herrmann-Pillath, 2021). The political imperative going along with this development is the subordination of the lifeworld under the reign of this central mythical

image. At its core, neoliberalism is a political program aiming at the constant realization of a social imagery that at the same time it propagates to already exist on a second stage behind the curtains (Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke, 2011). This is why neoliberal narratives, presumably lacking any alternatives, can wrap themselves in a glow of unpoliticalness. And this is why neoliberal policies never find a point of rest – there will always be a difference between the front stage and the backstage.

Figure 2. The Neoliberal Theater, my depiction

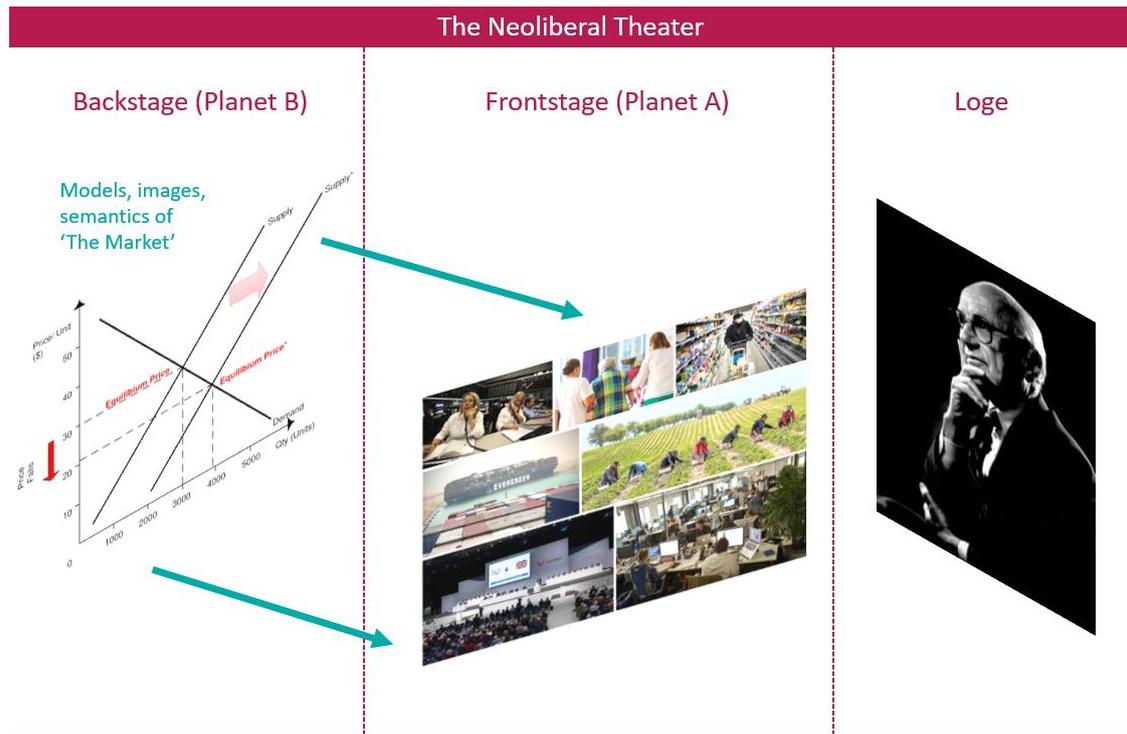


Photo courtesy portrait Milton Friedman: The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice.

The corresponding image of science and the scientist is that of a distanced expert, retreating into safe and comfortable loges. Having abandoned a chaotic and contradictory real world in intellectual terms, the hope is that it becomes possible to gain a cooled-down, objective view of reality's backstage. Looking right *beyond* reality demands a dissociation from it. In alignment with objectivist and positivist philosophies of science, economics has become enthralled with the hope of seeing ever further when retreating ever farther. Loges as materialized in academic chairs provide a tranquil spot in contemporary society to meditate and speculate about all sorts of background workings and eventually tell students and the public about it.

Now, the simple turn being proposed here is the abandonment of the illusory second ontic sphere behind the experienceable lifeworld. "There is no planet B" behind planet A. It is about time that economic science, freed from its neoliberal occupations, regains a plurality of serious relationships with planet A and the historical processes running on it – understanding relationships at least, caring relationships at best. That is why an economics of the future should seize to be paradigmatic in nature (at least in Kuhnian terms): for it will not help to replace a collectively unconscious planet B with a new and shiny planet C equally subliminal. Putting a serious relationship with a crisis-laden economic reality center stage will require an

ever plural, empirical (lat. *empiricus*: following the experience) and fundamentally pragmatic economics. The time for retreats into tranquil refuges of the mind is over. Paradigm shifts should not be historical exceptions happening once a century but rather the reflexive *modus operandi* of a science in constant and conscious adaptation to its surroundings. The dissociated economist should give way for the *engaged* and therefore ever attentive economist – both in intellectual and practical terms.

The normative meaning of “There is no planet B”

The one question any quest for shifting paradigms in economics or elsewhere has to answer and firmly hold alive is the question of *why* to shift at all – or, more generally speaking – why to set out for any economic-scientific endeavor in the first place. All too often, this fundamental question is being addressed on an anecdotal level at the most or relegated to the collective unconscious at worst. It is highly normative in nature for its (explicit or implicit) answering leads to all sorts of different styles of economic reasoning to be justified. To be clear: the valuation of these different variants of economics, stemming from different motivations to engage in it in the first place, cannot be answered from “nowhere” (Nagel 1986). At the motivational starting point of science, scientists necessarily have to legitimize themselves in connection to the non-scientific, the public. To put it differently: to legitimize science scientifically is a circular undertaking leading to the ever-refined reproduction of intellectual sameness. Science is necessarily motivated by non-scientific means, as it is always fundamentally rooted in non-scientific realms, just as the scientist is always first and also human, citizen, child, before assuming his:her profession. This is the reason why any scientific endeavor bears normative traits. So: why fight for a paradigm shift in economics?

In relation to the specific historical setting I am situated in, I propose to fundamentally change the outset of economics as a science out of two reasons: The first reason relates to the performativity or power of predominant economic thought, whose deep-seated frames are overwhelmingly inspired (mostly implicitly) by neoliberal narratives. Besides other factors, the performative and increasingly institutionalized subordination of socio-ecological realms under the reign of a fixed set of beliefs, under the central *eidōs* of a narrowly defined superpower called “The Market”, has contributed to an increasingly fatal deformation of the former. These processes have been termed “economic imperialism” (Becker, 1993; Fine and Milonakis, 2009), “economizations” (Çalışkan and Callon, 2009; 2010) or “financializations” (Polanyi Levitt, 2019) before. They have, for instance, led to a vulnerable institutional homogenization instead of institutional diversity (Schimank and Volkmann, 2012; Christensen, 2017), short-termism instead of long-term sustainability, efficiency-orientation instead of the orientation on equity, sufficiency or other values (Goodwin, 2009; Hoeschele, 2016), the focus on individual involvement rather than that of groups or societies, obscuration of socio-ecological embeddedness of economic action (Raworth, 2017), the reframing of nature and humans as means rather than ends (Adaman and Madra, 2014; Spring, 2015) etc.

The integration and reorganization of all sorts of economic, social and natural spheres by neoliberal means has undeniably led to an enormous expansion of monetarized value and, hence, of wealth. But it was deliberately not secured for its socially just sharing in spatial, ethnic, gender, generational etc. terms, contributing to fractured and highly polarized societies (United Nations and Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020; Alvaredo et al., 2017; Institute for Policy Studies, 2021). Furthermore, the program of economic imperialism deliberately contributed to the enclosure if not destruction of all sorts of lived institutional

and practical arrangements, of a diverse economic knowledge around the globe (i.e. Hilton, 2021; Shiva, 2005; Khan, 1994). Finally and most seriously: the gains in monetarized value came at the invaluable and in many cases irretrievable prize of natural destruction on and of Planet A (IPCC, 2018, chap. 3; 2015, sec. 2.2-2.4; IPBES and IPCC, 2021, 6ff.). The intellectual or practical contribution of significant parts of the economics discipline to this development alone is reason enough to engage in its transformation.

The second reason highlights the other reality of the economics discipline. For while economics has contributed to impoverishments of socio-ecological realms at its worst, it has contributed to their protection, reconstruction and transformation at its best (i.e. Ostrom, 1990; Storper and Salais, 1997; Unger 1998; Ghosh and Chandrasekhar, 2009; Drèze, 2017; Riahi et al., 2017; Kemfert, 2020). When actually opening up for a dialogical, interested interaction with real-world economic processes and *all* stakeholders involved in their realization, economics can help *them* to better realize *their* ends by *their* means. At least it can set out to understand economic reality as realized by living people, businesses and states in everyday practices – as opposed to reigned by timeless principles and laws. At best, and out of this anchoring in real-world evidence, it can describe pathways to different economic futures, informing public debates in search for pathways to cope with problems at hand.

Both of these reasons are combined in an unavoidable contextualization of the economics discipline in a historical setting it can help both understand and transform. Instead of clinging to long-dead sophistries of objectivity and value-neutrality, economists should be able to reflect and justify their specific associations towards extra-academic realms they are inescapably bound to. They do not just nurture scientists financially but allow them to be meaningful in existential terms. There has to be a planet A on which to imagine planets X, Y and Z, not the other way around. Hence, for economics, “There is no planet B” means that it should organize its institutional and intellectual existence around a fundamental care for planet A. It is no flaw of the scientist to care for the world and her:his specific subject (Pulcini, 2009; Roos and Hoffart, 2021; Howard-Grenville, 2021). Just as biologists advocate for species conservation based on their findings or virologists advocate for mask protection based on empirical evidence of their usefulness, economists can point to desirable actions to be taken. But stripped of the illusions of a Planet B, these actions will always have to relate to living people and the planet. It is ultimately *their* wellbeing that should be cared for as opposed to the wellbeing of abstract ideals or indicators. Thus, to check on the suitability of all sorts of interpretative means helping to grasp or measure the (economic) wellbeing of living people and the planet will remain an everlasting task of the discipline. Instead of dissociating from reality in order to gain and emit misleading unambiguousness, it should develop knowledge and proposals in direct association with an ever-ambiguous reality. The times for methodically or outright ideologically induced reliance on simplistic indicators of economic success emerging from Planet B’s have to come to an end.

In order to do so, economics will have to invigorate two senses long lost in its modern and postmodern tradition: a sense of reality on the one hand and an imaginative sense on the other.

Regaining a sense of reality: the interpretative turn

Diving deeply into the mythical worlds of Planet B and reproducing them every new semester, we economists have unlearned to perceive the obvious and self-evident. Certainly, the marginalist revolution and its successors with their hope to find certainty in abstraction had a paramount impact on this widening “real-world gap”. Ever since the 1870s, scientificity in economics has increasingly been connected with a formal dissociation from first-hand experiences and common knowledge (Düppe, 2009; Milonakis and Fine, 2009). As economists we deliberately lost our connection and empathy with our surrounding environment, we train future economists to learn this dissociation and we have inspired public debates to follow suit, thereby contributing to heated and dividing discourses, centering around ideological camps.

Any significant paradigm shift in economics will have to re-center around an *experientiable signified* in order to bring about orientation and meaningful debate. This shift will be both normative and epistemological in nature for it enables a new epistemic and moral relationship – an attitude – towards a world that in spite of its aggressive neglect in economics obviously never seized to exist. Traditions such as phenomenology (Husserl, 1996; Schütz, 1972), pragmatism (Dewey, 1922; Unger, 2007), critical realism (Archer 1995; Lawson 1997) and social theories of praxis (Giddens, 1984; Taylor, 1989; Reckwitz, 2002) among others can be of great help in this quest. One possibility to frame this scientific association with the world could be its denomination as *interpretative turn* in economics. Where does “the economy” take place? Which phenomena in space and time are we talking about? How are they being interpreted? Which actors are being involved in the realization and interpretation of the economic phenomenon at hand? What do they do, how do they do it and most importantly: why do they do it? “Real-world economics” should not wander on perennial paths itself, but always relate itself to a specific field, to specific actors to a specific economic phenomenon in time and space. What it will find is people relating themselves intellectually and performatively to their surroundings. In doing so they constantly (re-)produce social institutions in social resonance and conflict, some of them labelled “economic”. There is no Planet B, but uncounted interpretations of, handlings of and relationships towards Planet A. Economists can set out to reconstruct them, to provide public knowledge about these public economic institutions.

Being motivated to actually learn what is going on “out there”, this quest and the questions originating from it have to be posed openly. Instead of escaping reality from the outset or override it with the methodical equipment at hand, we can enter a serious and honest dialogue with the economic phenomena we are interested in. Ignorance is not a deficit, but a necessary component and a strong motivation of any scientific inquiry interested in worldly phenomena. Regaining a sense of reality starts with this humble confession.

Figure 3. Collage of economic phenomena on Planet A



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It resumes by adopting methodologies suitable and open for the addressed phenomena to show itself. Not method or theory but an engagement with reality sets the starting point for scientific inquiry. It is not *our* convictions or traditions to whom real-world economic phenomena have to bend, but *their* specificity and diversity to which our methodical tools and choices have to learn bending. This will only be possible when there is a knowledge of the plurality of methods at our disposal (Farrell, Luzzati, and Hove 2013). Luckily, we can rely on the work of social scientists (among them some economists) having resisted perennial temptations and developed a wide scope of methods to approach real-world social (and therefore also economic) phenomena. Reconstructive and ethnographic methodologies (Flick, Kardorff, and Steinke 2004; Flick 2014) are the ones, where economists will have to catch up dramatically. Certainly, quantitative methods as developed throughout the 20th century will have to remain at our disposal. But they should never become an end in itself again: measuring and counting historically embedded economic phenomena shall remain *one* possible interpretation of them besides countless others. The knowledge about the boundaries and the neglected insights of this specific epistemic approach will hold crucial in the training of future economists. This is a strong argument against any sort of “model platonism” (Albert, 1963) and for the humble assertion that quantitative interpretations of real-world economic processes are but one possible road to be taken. In this vein, mixed methodologies may prove to be a promising compromise to maintain traditional strengths of the discipline, combining and thereby limiting them in their potential danger to run astray.

Gaining an imaginative sense: the imaginative turn

While a sense of reality had been cultivated in classical Political Economy until the marginalist revolution, a second sense has never entered the discipline's center stage before. Still, what could be called an imaginative sense is more needed than ever in order to not just understand but gradually and fundamentally help transform economic realities. With it, economics could at least partially turn into a "science of possibilities" (Hochmann et al., 2019). At the core of this imaginative sense lies the simple fact, that social reality does not have to be as it is – that it could be otherwise. This is what we can learn from history. Social reality and "the economy" along with it, is being perceived as made and constantly altered by living people. As a fundamentally *(re-)produced* world by human actions, it can certainly be *(re-)produced otherwise*. There is not a hidden masterplan, law or necessity that runs the show, as methodological individualists and structuralists alike make us believe. There is one Planet A but uncountable possible interpretations and futures of it. This is the insight that could set off an *imaginative turn* in economics.

To illustrate this point on a discursive level, it just means that a term like "the economy" – like any other term – is arbitrary. It is *empty* to frame it negatively; it is *open* to frame it positively. The economy *is* not something, but it *becomes* something by the actions of living people attributing specific meanings to it. "The economy" is what we connect to it, what we refer to when we talk about it. The crucial question then becomes: What kind of practices and institutions do we mean when we talk about "the economy" and what other terms do we (want to) link to it? Questions on the institutional level arising from there are those of *different* practices, *different* social structures to be developed, invented and connected to respective signification processes (i.e. in discourse, images and so on).

The described emptiness of "the economy" is not a deficit of a segregated or even unscientific debate – it is just the display of the fundamental openness of economic relationships, practices, and institutions. Yes, the economy is an endless "discovery procedure" (Hayek, 1993, 67) – but this procedure also applies to what living people mean by the term "the economy". Its predominant link to "The Market" or "competition" is not the end of the debate, but one possibility next to endless different possibilities to frame the economy – and to be most clear – to frame what we mean by the term "market". The place, where this transformed understanding of new economies, where the imaginative sense, originates is the future (Beckert, 2016). Instead of surrendering to a "dictatorship of no alternatives" (Unger, 2015, 237), we can choose to engage in a democratic, scientifically informed debate about all sorts of economic futures. The tradition of economics itself (www.exploring-economics.org) but also public culture (Lash and Urry, 1994) referring to "the economy" has brought about a deep plurality of possible economic meanings. When working with these potentials constructively, it can lead to all sorts of economic practices and institutions – to all sorts of real-world economies. The contribution to and fostering of a public and scientifically informed debate about economic possibilities, their dangers and advantages, will be an important task for professional economists having revitalized this imaginative sense.

Of all possible scholars providing a starting point for this quest it is Adam Smith (in close resemblance with his friend Hume) from whom we can take at least the first steps to reimagine the economy (Matson and Doran, 2017; Ötsch and Graupe, 2020, 9 ff.). For he outlines a road, subsequently not taken, of human practice as well as scholarship concerned with these practices that centers around the human capability to imagine "otherness"; "otherness" of worldly phenomena and arrangements but also "otherness" of our fellow

human beings and, crucially, “otherness” of ourselves when reframed from a different angle. Combined with the capacity of sympathy, that allows us to assess social reality from different physical, emotional, intellectual and moral standpoints we gain a path of economic imagination rooted not in identity but in difference, preoccupied not with the actual but with the possible.

Around a quarter of a millennium on, this imaginative capability is ever more needed in a world suffering under the established social practices and institutions, ever reproducing the past within the present. The need for a fundamental transformation of our societies and, above all, our economies is self-evident in the light of interconnected economic, social, political and ecological crises. Addressing these crises by means of an imaginative sense demands of us to think in terms of their potential futures and the practices that most likely lead to democratically ruled desirable futures. Again, as with the sense of reality, the vitalization of the imagination will require methodical as well as didactical innovations in economics. The quantitative extrapolations of the past into an uncertain future in forecasting techniques should be extended by the wide range of qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods techniques as developed, for instance, in future studies (Glenn and Gordon 2009; Saleh et al., 2008). With regard to the reform of educational contexts economics, to provide for a “futures literacy” (Miller, 2018) will be of central importance.

Learning how to combine both senses here and now: the transformative turn

As already illustrated, economics will only be able to regain meaningfulness when humbly, consciously and imaginatively relating itself to real-world issues. The synthesizing rather than a rigorous specialization of our renewed capabilities will prove to be important in this challenge. Neither should a sense of reality engage in endless data collection or description, nor should an imaginative sense lose itself in a postmodern *laissez-faire* of potential meanings. The challenge lies in the balanced interplay of both senses with reference to experienceable phenomena, that is, to real-world issues. “What is actually going on out there?” and “How could it be otherwise?” and “How could we possibly get there?” will be guiding flashlights in an economics with both explorative as well as transformative ambitions – an economics haven taken the *transformative turn*.

This synthetic capability requires both senses as outlined before and, above that, the ability to identify the respective bridgeheads connecting actuality with possibility. Where do transformative possibilities already exist in the present? Or where are the weak points of the present, possibly allowing for cracking them further towards an imagined future? Will we have to *perceive* and think about this specific economic setting anew or just allow for the already *silently done* to be scaled and institutionalized? There will not be any blueprint in answering these questions but rather an experiential, tentative progression. At least in these processes, future economists will closely work together with practitioners, policymakers and citizen scientists, learning from and with them, reshaping the discipline’s profile as not only inter- but also as a transdisciplinary science (Irwin, 2002; Moulaert, 2013; Backhaus et al., 2018; Waddock 2020).

Figure 4. Example of a transformative economics: Kate Raworth at a Doughnut Action Lab



Photo courtesy by Imandeep Kaur.

It is especially in economic education where, besides enabling the dissemination of useful knowledge as well as its deconstruction or critique, we could set out this experiential task (Bäuerle, 2020). In the 21st century, economic education, especially higher education, can advance to *the* single most transformational hotspot. If we free ourselves from the endless reproduction of the ever same and senseless, it is these societal spaces and times where and when economic futures as related to actual fields of transformations can be developed. Yes, it will require a change of relationships both towards students as well as towards economic actors “out there” coping with and ever transforming reality in everyday life. But the presumed “loss” in hierarchical power of those formerly monopolizing knowledge will possibly return in public appreciation and a sense of meaningfulness or purpose when we transform ourselves into *engaged economists*. Let us use economic education to get out, enter into a reflexive dialogue with economic realities, discovering their potentials, searching jointly for future-fit ways forward.

Institutions matter (most)

Now, if we take this sketch of an “economics for the future” seriously, we have to think about the pathways to its realization. The discipline *itself* will have to undergo processes as outlined in the section above. As numerous cases in the history of economics have shown, potentially promising ideas alone will never do the trick. This is where the neoliberal thought collective has demonstrated remarkable anticipatory insight and strength. Future economists will have to step up to this institutional heritage in order to develop a full responsibility towards their intellectual work. Whether paradigm shifts as outlined here or elsewhere actually materialize will depend on the active engagement of scholars in the transformation of the production process of science as such. Besides developing alternatives *what* to do next, we have to practically realize alternatives *how* to do it (always keeping alive the *why* to do it).

In order to become reality, paradigm shifts need to be institutionalized. It is study programs, chairs, departments, associations, lasting bonds with extra-academic partners and a solidly funded network of caretakers that can bring about long-lasting institutional change. In this process, the economics student movement has taken the lead role in the last decade. It is the young generation, the generation of future economists that has chosen to organize the education it wants and to build the stages for the research it considers promising (ISIPE, 2014; Rethinking Economics, 2021; Netzwerk Plurale Ökonomik, 2021). And it is overwhelmingly them that have contributed to a public signification of the economics discipline – doubting its usefulness in its current shape and picturing a discipline in the service of people and the planet (Economists for Future International, 2019; Economists for Future DE, 2020). It is their (mostly unpaid) engagement and their strong will to actually cope both intellectually and practically with economies in dire need of transformation that should provide a strong basis for at least two groups of actors to highly engage in the institutionalization of alternatives.

The first group is an international community of critical scholars in economics (still) holding institutional power positions at their respective universities, public or private institutions or research labs. These spaces have to be used in order to widen and secure them. To this end, the concentration on common interests rather than on differences will be important. Intellectual homogenization is not a prerequisite for this effort. What suffices is a strong commitment to the first two senses outlined above: the least common denominator of a shared (economic) reality to be investigated and a never-ending dialogue about the possibilities of its alteration. To be most clear: today, too much potential is lost in scholarly vanities. This is a luxury we just cannot afford to continue any more.

This group needs to be joined by a second group of political and societal actors who partake in the funding of projects, institutions, initiatives and political guidelines. Together they need to engage in a democratic debate about the significance of academic economics for the wider public. For too long, in economics, the freedom of scientific endeavor as granted by national policies or even constitutions has been denied to scholars seeking new paths to understand the economy. The “intellectual monoculture” resulting from the overwhelming homogenization process in the discipline has contributed to the vulnerability of societies to handle (economic) crises or even prevent them from happening. Hence, it is in their best interest (or even their constitutional responsibility) to provide for a pluralist and transformative economics.

Certainly, the cooperation of both groups will be of paramount importance. Forums for dialogue between economists for the future and a public in search for future-fit solutions in economic matters are essential in this regard. Here, a democratic discourse about societal needs and possible economic and other scientific contributions to their solution can provide for a common ground so urgently needed in dangerously fractured societies of the 21st century. To go down this road in democratically representative ways, it will have to be an inclusive dialogue that integrates individuals and groups from all spectrums of the global society. Institutionally diversifying economics and public economic discourse is not a matter of postmodern fashion but of social justice and human respect (D-ECON, 2021). Besides addressing the questions of why, how and what economists should be thinking, talking and acting, the question of *who* actually forms the discipline and gets a chance to sit at present and future roundtables on future economies will have to be kept alive. The quest for pluralism does not stop with methods, theories and disciplines, but expands into the social production process of economic knowledge as such. As empirical assessments show, a lot remains to be done in this regard (Bayer and Rouse, 2016).

Conclusion

“Beyond indifference”: this is not a signpost proposing to replace indifference curves with behavioral experiments. It is an invitation to rearrange the relationships of economics and economists with society and nature. An economics of the future will not retreat into loges, commanding the workings on the frontstage with a presumed knowledge about a presumed backstage. It will not get trapped again in timeless conceptions, methodologies, and theorems. Rather, it will humbly and out of an open epistemic engagement with economic realities contribute to a public debate about how to interpret and transform economic practices and institutions. It will set out to understand the manifold differences and ambiguities that make up our economic lifeworld. It will not emit last words again, but always invite and provoke debate and alteration. The sentence “I don’t know” will not be a sign of weakness, but a commonplace of scientific honesty and a denominator of public reliability. For economics will have learned from its very own past that last words running astray may have grave impact. Crucially, it will place institutional safeguards that do not undermine but enable the discipline’s own, never-ending re-assessment and transformation, for instance, by anchoring the training of historical as well as philosophical capabilities at its study programmes’ core. In this vein, the self-critical reflection of its uncritical participation in a political project disguised in a discursive glow of unpoliticalness will mark the starting point.

Taking all these aspects together, economics ceases to resemble a paradigmatic, normal or textbook science in the Kuhnian sense. It will become an art of pluralist economic sensemaking in relation to lived reality providing for future-fit economies to emerge out of democratic debate and decision-making.

History has shown that economics can be a powerful science. Let us now subsume this potential under the quests to understand and care for Planet A.

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