

**AFTER SAMUELSON:
LIBERAL EDUCATION FOR ECONOMISTS**

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Abstract

Most economics majors today, like their counterparts fifty years ago, are unable to demonstrate retained understanding of economic principles or to apply them to real-life situations (Stigler 1963; Bice *et al.* 2015). Yet the Samuelsonian mode of economics education persists, due in part to limited cooperation among educators who would favor reforms to enhance students' capacities for self-directed analysis and learning. The author argues that economists' shared commitment to the Enlightenment aim of teaching students to think for themselves could facilitate broad-based conversations about and support for liberal revisions to the learning goals, teaching strategies, and curricular structures of the economics major. In support of this claim, the paper demonstrates that liberal education ideals are native to virtually every branch of modern economics and explores how undergraduate economics education might be enhanced if economists of diverse theoretical traditions were to engage in more conversations about how to expand students' intellectual capabilities.

Keywords

liberal education, intellectual freedom, professional ethics, reflective judgment, critical thinking

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INTRODUCTION

Economics remains a popular course of study in the United States and across the globe. Yet even our most talented majors are often unable to demonstrate retained understanding of economic principles (Walstad and Allgood 1999; Bice *et al.* 2015) or to apply their economic knowledge to real-life situations (Salemi and Siegfried 1999; Hansen, Salemi, and Siegfried 2002; Katz and Becker 1999). This inability to generate “learning that lasts” (Stigler 1963) and “independent problem-solving skills” (Fels 1974) has plagued the Samuelsonian enterprise since the 1950s. After passing through a standard sequence of core courses in “blackboard economics” (Coase 1992) in which little attention is paid to history, philosophy, or institutional context (Marglin 2008; Siegfried 2009), our graduates emerge with only superficial command of *introductory*-level economics, displaying “great confidence about disputed issues” while lacking “knowledge of the relevant economic literature” (Wolcott 2014: 4).

The intellectual underdevelopment of our undergraduate majors is an ethical failure of our profession. Learning is of course a shared duty of teachers and students. But when otherwise capable students show similar deficits over multiple generations, teachers and departments must acknowledge their dereliction of Socratic duty – their (our) failure to bring students “into a position of intellectual independence” (Strike 1982: 135) as junior members of our academic community.

Confronting this ethical failure is doubly challenging within the discipline of economics where prevailing professional norms deny the existence of educators’ ethical duties (apart from the duty to comply with the policies and procedures of one’s own institution). Under the Samuelsonian premise that economics is a science with a well-defined set of core concepts and propositions (Samuelson 1967: 197-198), students’ intellectual freedom is regarded as an ornamental extra, a potential addition to the ‘breadth’ of one’s undergraduate education (e.g., through courses in economic history, contending economic theories, or the history of economic thought) but peripheral to the core or ‘depth’ of economic learning. Core theory courses are typically conducted in boot-camp fashion, via tool-oriented, expert-centered pedagogies (Becker and Watts 1996, 2001; Watts and Becker 2008; Harter, Becker, and Watts 2011; Watts and Schaur 2011). When students raise questions about standard textbook arguments, the Socratic instructor is duty bound “to give reasons,” to respect the student’s right “to question and debate the conclusions reached by experts” (Strike 1982: 49); but the implicit Samuelsonian ethic conveys no such duty. Kinder souls may elect to give reasons, but no ethical line is crossed by the professor who illiberally responds, “Just learn the models; then we’ll talk.”

Economics educators trained in the Samuelsonian mode tend not to recognize their illiberal tendencies. They, their teachers, and their teachers' teachers long ago normalized the idea that the undergraduate degree course in economics, as in the natural sciences, is "a dogmatic initiation in a pre-established tradition that the student is not equipped to evaluate" (Kuhn 1977: 229). Paradoxically, these same educators tend to assume that "the analytical nature of most economics courses inherently teaches students to think critically" (Borg and Borg 2001: 20) and are unlikely to acknowledge the possibility that received methods of economics education may undercut students' desire and ability to learn. They may teach their whole careers without effectively confronting the ethical-pedagogical riddle at the heart of undergraduate education: the delicate dance of "helping people help themselves" as learners (Ellerman 2005; see also Finkel and Arney 1995).

In this essay, I propose a rhetorical strategy for addressing this collective ethical-educational failure: an ecumenical, freedom-centered strategy for advancing the liberal education aims, methods, and outcomes of undergraduate economics education. I agree with George DeMartino (2011: 14-16) that the heart of professional economic ethics is scholarly inquiry and civil discourse among colleagues, not the formulation and enforcement of formal codes. I also share Deirdre McCloskey's "conversational view of intellectual life," a pluralistic view in which "[t]he crucial point . . . is that conversations overlap" (McCloskey 1994: 100). The field of economics education is itself a rudimentary exemplar of ethics-as-conversation, where practitioners engage in ongoing dialogue about their professional work (DeMartino 2011: 87). But the field is deeply segregated along mainstream/heterodox lines, and the heterodox conversation is further divided among different schools of thought. As a result, the breadth and strength of would-be alliances among economics educators are chronically compromised.

My major claim, drawing from my own previous work on pluralism and intellectual freedom in undergraduate economics (Garnett 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, in press; Garnett and Butler 2009; McGoldrick and Garnett 2013; Garnett and McGoldrick 2014), is that economists' shared commitment to the Enlightenment aim of teaching students to think for themselves (Fels 1974; Siegfried *et al.* 1991; Shackelford 1992; Ferber 1999) could facilitate broad-based conversations about and support for liberal revisions to the learning goals, teaching strategies, and curricular structures of the economics major. My argument is inspired by Amartya Sen's "development as freedom" project (Sen 1999; Garnett 2009a). To address the most pressing forms of unfreedom such as preventable morbidity or lack of access to basic education, Sen sought to build alliances among diverse constituencies by reframing economic development as "a process of expanding the real freedoms people enjoy" (Sen 1999: 3). Extending Sen's notion of freedom-as-capability (*ibid.*: 13-53) to the educational realm, I seek to encourage an inclusive, pluralistic dialogue on the goals and methods of undergraduate economics education, to give voice to the plurality of educators who favor (or could be persuaded to support) the expansion of students' real intellectual freedoms – their capacities for "independent and critical thought" (Siegfried *et al.* 1991: 199).

The paper is organized in two parts. Part one demonstrates that liberal education ideals are native to virtually every branch of modern economics, examining notions of intellectual

freedom in mainstream and heterodox approaches, and in feminist, Austrian, institutionalist, and social traditions of heterodox economics. Part two explores briefly how undergraduate economics education might be enhanced if economists of diverse theoretical traditions were to engage in more conversations about how to expand students' intellectual capabilities. Like Sen, I seek to harness the paradigmatic diversity of economics educators, not to forge a unified approach but to create a pluralistic community of thought capable of reaching agreements on the low-hanging fruit of educational reform: freedom-enhancing measures to which economists of all stripes could reasonably assent.

PROSPECTIVE ALLIES: THE SILENT PLURALITY IN ECONOMICS EDUCATION

Even as the structure, pedagogy, and tacit philosophy of undergraduate economics have remained predominantly Samuelsonian, a rich array of liberal education alternatives have flourished—for decades, across multiple schools of thought—in the interstices of the dominant approach. In this section, we survey the shared liberal heritage of these otherwise diverse projects.

Mainstream and Heterodox

Despite many substantive differences, the literatures of heterodox and mainstream economics education reveal a shared commitment to teaching students to think for themselves. A revealing example of these overlapping values can be seen in the broad dissent that arose in response to the “Voluntary Economics Content Standards for Pre-College Economics Education” (National Council of Economic Education 1997; Siegfried and Meszaros 1997, 1998) and to the subsequent push for a “less is more” revision of micro- and macroeconomic principles courses (Frank 1998; Hansen *et al.* 2002; Kennedy 2006).

The “content standards” were an effort to streamline and standardize the core principles taught in high school economics courses (Siegfried and Meszaros 1997). However, the standards were derived from and have subsequently influenced the revision of material presented in most US college textbooks, books whose influence reaches far beyond the United States (Ferber 1999: 136). The “less is more” initiative sought to shift principles courses from “encyclopedic” approaches to “short lists of topics” in order to reallocate “recovered course resources to help students apply the basic tools of economics to problems and questions they will face throughout their lives” (Salemi 2009). Though not intentionally, both campaigns gave impetus to the development and marketing of Gregory Mankiw’s *Principles of Economics* (1998), which came to be seen as the prototype for a new generation of “less is more” principles texts (Schneider and Shackelford 2001).

Marianne Ferber, a leading feminist economist, delivered the sharpest initial criticism of the national content standards (Ferber 1999). Taking exception to the claim that the standards “are, in fact, the fundamental propositions of economics” (Siegfried and Meszaros 1997: 247), Ferber argued that,

It is difficult, if not impossible, to teach economics effectively while pretending that there is consensus in the discipline about either theory or policy. . . . Ignoring these issues deprives students of learning about the most thought-provoking discussions of the profession (1999: 137–138).

Similar criticisms followed from other feminist and heterodox economists (Lewis and McGoldrick 2001; Schneider and Shackelford 2001) and more recently from Stephen Marglin, who rejects the Samuelsonian thrust of these and other efforts to improve students' economic literacy. "Teaching a catechism," says Marglin (2012: 288), "is not how to cultivate the questioning and searching that is the end product we should be seeking."

These responses express heterodox economists' commitment to intellectual pluralism and critical thinking as necessary elements in economics education at all levels (Earl 2000; Colander 2001; Feiner 2002; Fullbrook 2003; Garnett and Klopfenstein 2003). Mainstream depictions of economics as a single coherent view are rejected by heterodox economists as factually misleading, pedagogically counterproductive, and tantamount to an "illiberal education" (Marglin 2009). Instead they favor introducing "competing views on recurring problems in economics" (Raveaud 2003), even at the introductory level (Feiner and Roberts 1995; Knoedler and Underwood 2003; Nelson 2011; O'Donnell 2009; Underwood 2004), to enable students to "learn how to think critically and independently—the essence of a liberal undergraduate education" (Moseley, Gunn, and Georges 1991: 237; see also Barone 1991). Other disagreements notwithstanding, all heterodox economics educators would find congenial George Shackle's Socratic vision of the undergraduate enterprise:

The first task of the University teacher of any liberal art is surely to persuade his students that the most important things he will put before them are questions and not answers. He is going to put up for them a scaffolding, and leave them to build within it. He has to persuade them that they have not come to the University to learn as it were by heart things which are already hard-and-fast and cut-and-dried, but to watch and perhaps help in a process, the driving of a causeway which will be made gradually firmer by the traffic of many minds. (Shackle 1953: 18)

The mainstream economics education literature features parallel efforts "to empower students with a self-sustaining capacity to think and learn" (Siegfried *et al.* 1991: 201). William Becker, former editor of the *Journal of Economic Education*, deplores the remedial, illiberal thrust of "less is more" and the national content standards:

The dumbing down of economics to the dogmatic preaching of a few simple concepts, principles, and axioms of old misses the excitement of modern day economics and is a deceitful representation of the science of economics and a disservice to students seeking a higher education (2007: 9).

Becker advocates a broader approach, even in introductory courses, to "show students that economics is a science that is innovating and evolving with social change" (2004: 58) and to expose them to the complexities of applying textbook principles whose underlying assumptions "are unlikely to be met in actual circumstances" (2007: 5).

Becker's objections resonate with the liberal education ethos of the mainstream economics education community, a tradition that includes Rendigs Fels's efforts to redirect undergraduate economics education toward the "development of independent problem-solving skills" (Fels 1974: 404). Fels and his collaborators (Richard Leftwich, Ansel Sharp, Stephen Buckles, and Paul Grimes) created a problem-centered, case study approach to introductory economics, aiming to help students learn to think like liberally educated economists (Grimes 2009). "Applying economic principles to new situations requires judgment," Fels argued, including normative value judgments (Fels and Buckles 1981: 16). Even though the questions raised in a case often had "no clearly right or wrong answers," Fels believed the soundness of students' judgments could be improved with training and practice (1974: 405). In presenting these cases to students, Fels would explain that their purpose was "not to provide cut-and-dried answers for you to memorize but to train you . . . to think for yourself" (Fels and Buckles 1981: 16) and "to highlight the role which values and norms must play in the formulation of policy" (Fels 1974: 405).

The educational perspectives of Ferber, Marglin, Becker, Fels, *et al.* hardly comprise a united front. Yet all are committed to helping students gain some proficiency in the art of what John Dewey (1933) called reflective thinking or what later generations called critical thinking: the art of formulating reasoned solutions to problems for which "there is no way to apply a formula to derive a correct solution and no way to prove definitively that a proposed solution is correct" (King and Kitchener 1994: 6; Perry 1970; Thoma 1993; Nelson 1997; Paul 1999). Critical thinking advocates in economics (Fels 1974; Shackelford 1992; Thoma 1993; Ferber 1999; Colander 2001; Becker 2007, to name a few) see it as a liberal alternative to the "algorithmic thinking" (Marglin 2008: 128–146) and "complex correct thinking" (Nelson 1997: 62) promoted by standard Samuelsonian textbook problems, i.e., "the thinking required to solve problems where there is a single right answer and the teacher has taught the students 'the way' to find that answer" (*ibid.*: 62).

The link between critical thinking and intellectual freedom is illustrated by the familiar Perry scheme (Perry 1970). On the Perry ladder of intellectual and ethical development, learners progress from a black-and-white stage in which they "assume that valid questions have certain answers and that teachers should teach those answers or unambiguous rules for finding them" (Nelson 1989: 17) to higher levels of thinking in which they must choose . . . among second-best alternatives with no guarantee that their choices will be welfare-improving (Lipsey and Lancaster 1956: 23). Learners are propelled to each higher stage by the realization that the subject matter "encompasses meaningful uncertainty" (Nelson 1989: 18), that the veracity of ideas previously regarded as absolute is in fact contingent and contestable. Each new layer of uncertainty brings new demands and opportunities to think for oneself, a process that requires courage and encouragement since it often entails losses of previous identities and knowledge (Earl 2000).

To put the same point differently, these mainstream and heterodox approaches share a commitment to liberal education: education that is *liberalis* ("fitted for freedom") because it provides students with the tools and opportunities to become intellectual free agents who are

free not because of wealth or birth” but because they “can call their minds their own . . . (because) they have looked into themselves and developed the ability to separate mere habit and convention from what they can defend by argument” (Nussbaum 1997: 293). Mainstream and heterodox educators believe that economics courses should enable students to meaningfully understand, explore, and apply basic concepts “to problems and questions they will face throughout their lives—not in the workplace but as they exercise their rights as free human beings” (Salemi 2009: 104).

This broad liberal tradition is also the hearth of modern economics. Adam Smith, for example, assigned great importance to intellectual freedom and reflective judgment in his theories of moral and economic order. In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* ([1790] 1984), Smith explores the human capacity to judge one’s own conduct:

We endeavor to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it. . . . It is only by consulting this judge within, that we can ever see what relates to ourselves in its proper shape and dimensions; or that we can ever make any proper comparison between our own interests and those of other people (Smith [1790] 1976: 110 and 134).

In *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Smith speaks of intellectual autonomy (one’s capacity for “rational conversation”) as a basic human capability, without which one is “incapable . . . of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life” or of “the great and extensive interests of his country” (Smith [1776] 1981: 782), hence unfit to participate effectively in the communities that comprise one’s personal, civic, and professional life.

Smith associates intellectual autonomy with self-mastery or self-command (Harpham 2000). When he speaks of human freedom, he envisions not atomistic moral agents but socially embedded individuals who gain the capacity to think for themselves via ongoing social interaction “in the great school of self-command” (1976 [1759]: 146). Samuel Fleischacker (1999) suggests that Smith regarded the “freedom to judge” as an elemental form of human liberty. Smith, he argues, “construes freedom above all as that which enables one to judge for oneself – unlike a child, who requires others to judge for her, who requires tutelage” (*ibid.*: 4). For Smith, such freedom is a necessary condition for the proper exercise of other Smithian virtues (*viz.*, prudence, beneficence, and justice).

Across Heterodox Traditions

Though feminist economists have written far more than other heterodox groups about economics education, the Austrian, institutionalist, and social economics traditions contain important conceptual resources in their own right. We are well advised to recognize the congruent themes and values in these literatures regarding the nature of knowledge, learning, and education. In so doing, we plant seeds for new conversations about liberal education reform in undergraduate economics.

Feminist economics Inspired by the notion of “education as the practice of freedom” (hooks 1994: 207) and the goal of “empowering students to become critical and creative learners” (Shackelford 1992: 570), feminist economic educators are “committed to the activation of each student’s independent mind and to the production of a community that can reason together about a problem, not just trade claims and counterclaims” (Nussbaum 1997: 19). With regard to individual learners, feminist educators place a high value on inclusivity. They seek to make economics relevant and intelligible to students who differ along many dimensions (gender, race, class, ethnicity, age, geographic location, sexual orientation, learning style, and others), and to make their classrooms hospitable to all by providing a “connected learning environment for students”: “connected to other students, to the instructor, to the material, and to their communities” (Aerni *et al.* 1999: 14).

With regard to classroom pedagogy, feminists aim to create learning communities in which “the flow of [learning] is multidirectional, with students and teachers engaged in the joint process of creating knowledge as members of the scholarly community” (Bartlett and Feiner 1992: 563). In contrast to the “sage on stage” model, feminists emphasize the multiplicity of voices in the educational process including the diversity of perspectives within the discipline of economics itself. They also stress trust, without which most students lack the courage or desire to do hard things such as exposing their ideas, challenging other people’s ideas, or making themselves vulnerable to others’ scrutiny (Palmer 1990: 15).

Austrian economics Despite a relatively small Austrian literature on economics education, Friedrich Hayek’s novel concepts of knowledge and learning hold illuminating implications for pedagogy (Garnett 2009b). Through a Hayekian lens, teaching itself can be redefined as a process of epistemic system design: setting up a polycentric web of instruction, study, and conversation in hopes of generating “a kind of ‘intelligence’ far greater than the sum of its parts” (Lavoie 1995b: 125). In this decentralized learning process, students develop their own connections to ideas, guided by critical feedback from teachers, peers, literature, and the subject matter itself – in contrast to a “centrally planned” classroom in which the governing authorities (teachers and textbooks) presume to possess and dispense all relevant knowledge.

A Hayekian/Austrian pedagogy also recognizes the unique albeit tacit knowledge possessed by each individual (Lavoie 1995b), knowledge that remains inarticulate until the person is “faced with a problem where [it] will help” (Hayek 1979: 190). Hayek (1945) famously writes:

[T]here is beyond question a body of very important but unorganized knowledge which cannot possibly be called scientific in the sense of knowledge of general rules: the knowledge of the particular circumstances of time and place. It is with respect to this that practically every individual has some advantage over all others because he possesses unique information of which beneficial use might be made, but of which use can be made only if the decisions depending on it are left to him or are made with his active cooperation (1945: 521-522).

For Hayek and other Austrians, the act of thinking or knowing is an appropriation of information via each individual’s “learned and skillful judgment” (Boettke 2002: 269). As Oakeshott explains:

[I]nformation . . . never constitutes the whole of what we know. Before any concrete skill or ability can appear, information must be partnered by “judgment” . . . [to generate] knowledge or “ability” to do, to make, or to understand and explain (2001 [1989]: 49 and 57).

Institutionalist economics Institutional thinking on education flows from the work of John Dewey, who famously claims:

No thought, no idea, can possibly be conveyed as an idea from one person to another. When it is told, it is, to the one to whom it was told, another given fact, not an idea. The communication may stimulate the other person to realize the question for himself and to think out a like idea, or it may smother his intellectual interest and suppress his dawning effort at thought. But what he directly gets cannot be an idea. Only by wrestling with the conditions of the problem at first hand, seeking and finding his own way out, does he think (Dewey 1916: 159).

Teachers can provide the conditions for learning but only the learners can provide the effort and subjective wherewithal to make ideas their own – to think and know for themselves (Ellerman 2005; Bystrom 1997; Smith and Waller 1997; Finkel 2000; Tagg 2003). This very theme is taken up by former World Bank economist David Ellerman (2005), who argues that development assistance becomes “unhelpful help” when it overrides or undercuts people’s capacity for self-reliance:

Helpers cannot and should not try “to do development.” Helpers can at best use indirect, enabling, and autonomy-respecting methods to bring doers to the threshold. The doers have to do the rest on their own in order to make it their own. The doers will acquire development only as the fruits of their own labor (Ellerman 2005: 252).

Extended to the undergraduate classroom, Ellerman’s analysis of the helper/doer conundrum recalls the Deweyan notion that learning is the inalienable responsibility of the learner.

Similar ideas were taken up by a previous generation of institutionalists, most notably John Fagg Foster (1981), who followed Dewey in defining intellectual freedom not as mere license but as capability or “discretion, the genuine right to choose among available genuine alternatives” (Foster 1981: 972). Jim Street (1983) employs Foster’s concept to describe the lack of academic freedom in the education and professional development of Ph.D. economists, while Marc Tool (1989) uses it to underscore professors’ academic duty to cultivate students’ “capacities for self-directed critical and coherent analysis” (Tool 1989).

Social economics Students’ intellectual freedom, defined as the capacity to “make reasoned judgments about complex issues” (Wight 2009: 53), is central to the social economists’ vision of economics teaching and learning. The importance of this concept for social economists flows from their commitment to the moral autonomy and dignity of individuals (Clary *et al.* 2006) and from their appreciation of the value-laden character of economic analysis (Wight 2012: 197). In their view, normative matters are no less pertinent to core micro- and macroeconomic theory courses than they are to “breadth” courses such as economic history or history of economic thought.

For social economists, students' capacity for reflective judgment necessarily includes "the ability to scrutinize one's own values, to examine the ethical foundations of economic perspectives, and to engage in and make reasoned judgments" (Emami in press). The purpose of such critical thinking is not "domination and victory over those who disagree with you" (Browne and Keeley 2001: 10) but to "question our own purposes, evidence, conclusions, implications, and point of view with the same vigor as we question those of others" (Paul and Elder 2001: 2) since "judgments derived from the reflective thinking process always remain open to further scrutiny, evaluation, and reformulation" (King and Kitchener 1994: 7-8). Pedagogically and ethically, social economists endorse the Socratic view of the college's teacher's role and duty, "not to simply deliver content but to build the scaffolding necessary for the development of the learner's autonomy" (Emami in press).

PROSPECTIVE CONSEQUENCES

If economists across the spectrum were to become more cognizant of their shared liberal education values and duties, what could realistically be achieved? I see two concrete avenues.

Cultivating the Liberal Educator

The increasingly technical nature of economics PhD training since the 1980s casts a daunting shadow of doubt over the feasibility of any liberal education reform in undergraduate economics education (Colander and McGoldrick 2009: 3-39), as more and more members of the economics professoriate are presumably inclined to say, "I want students to achieve liberal education outcomes, but since I am not trained to provide them, students would be better off getting these proficiencies in general education courses outside the economics major" (Solow 1990; Colander 1991, 2001).

The problem is real, and suggests the need for special conferences and workshops to fill the liberal education gap in academic economists' professional training. On the other hand, academic economists' demands for assistance from outside teaching experts are notoriously limited. Most ignore the monthly teaching/learning newsletter, partly due to time pressures but also because the specialized language of pedagogical experts is foreign to them or because the offer of expert assistance seems to come from imperious outsiders who do not appreciate the discipline of economics or the long-standing norms of economics education.

An alternative response to the perceived shortage of economists capable of teaching courses to achieve liberal education outcomes would be to think in terms of expanding the resources, opportunities, and incentives for all Ph.D. faculty members to discover and develop their latent liberal education capabilities. Colleges and universities are flush with learned, creative thinkers with troves of knowledge and gratitude from their own undergraduate experiences and an abiding interest in the liberal enterprise of helping young (and older) adults to own and develop their own minds. In this connection, we must not underestimate the power

of the voluntary. Busy colleagues will be more likely to engage in productive pedagogical reflection and revision if induced to do so voluntarily rather than required to do so as a mandatory assessment exercise. When faculty members gather informally over lunch or coffee, or in more structured settings like reading groups or round-robin class visits, they are more likely to come away with fresh ideas and inspiration due to the civic character of the experience: voluntary, off-the-record interactions whose value often exceeds expectations.

The larger point is that our resources as undergraduate educators are never limited to the knowledge and skills we acquire as graduate students. Educator Parker Palmer (1998) argues that our authority and effectiveness in the classroom flows from “the teacher within” (*ibid.*: 30-31), and that our teaching selves are profoundly shaped by our experiences as students, viz., by the “mentors who evoked us” and the “subjects that chose us” (*ibid.*: 21 and 25). Palmer’s thesis underscores the potency of professional-ethical dialogue, the formative and performative impacts of ethical talk on “all matters pertaining to the identity, character, and behavior of the professional” (2011: 85). This applies in spades to ethical talk about teaching, an area of our professional lives we for too long – especially in economics – have treated as private. As we begin to unpack the tacit ideas and values that inspire us as educators, we make “the teacher within” a generative ally, for ourselves and for our colleagues.

To illustrate one direction such conversations might take, consider the intellectual-cum-educational resources embedded in different disciplines or schools of thought. The expert-centered view of teaching as “a generic, practical, instrumental activity largely divorced from the serious intellectual work of research” obscures the intimate ties between teaching and research (Rowland 2006: 71). Stephen Rowland suggests academic development forums to allow faculty members to “[bring] teaching and research into a closer relationship” (*ibid.*: 13). Rowland believes that “when academics from different disciplines are given the space and encouragement to speak to each other about their work in terms that matter to them” (*ibid.*: 69-70), they frequently discover connections among their disciplinary idioms that “can challenge and deepen both disciplinary thinking and educational ideas,” e.g., a cell biologist and systems engineer who strike up a conversation about their differing notions of “feedback” and potential applications of these concepts (*ibid.*: 71). Such conversations can unearth tacit educational resources embedded within our respective disciplines or schools of thought (Garnett and Vanderlinden 2011).

Another potentially fruitful path would be to explore the analytic and pre-analytic grounds on which we ourselves adjudicate among competing arguments, and to brainstorm with colleagues about how this self-knowledge might be employed as a pedagogical tool. Biologist Craig Nelson (1989) argues that students’ capacity for higher-order thinking is greatly enhanced when they see their professor as “an individual striving, like the students, to interpret a complex and uncertain world”:

Although lectures require much prior thinking, it may seem to the students as if professors spontaneously think the way we lecture, as if “real” thinking is beyond the students’ reach. This impact can be softened by exploring new ideas as they emerge during class and by noting how our views have changed: the

mistakes and other factors that led to changes, the alternatives we explored and rejected, and the changes we are now considering (Nelson 1989: 24).

By candidly revealing the pathways of our own thinking – how we ourselves have combined theory, evidence, values, and other prior assumptions to reach reasoned conclusions about complex or controversial questions – we give students a concrete model of how to think critically within our discipline. Faculty members also benefit from this activity, especially those who are “unaware of the values and beliefs that are implicit in their approach to a subject” or who find it difficult to “raise their assumptions to an explicit level for acknowledgement and examination” (Ehrlich and Colby 2004: 38).

Enhanced Learning for Students

Expansion of liberal education talk across the economics profession could also enhance the possibilities for collective action – at the department level and beyond – to address matters of shared concern such as the attachment of liberal education outcomes to more undergraduate courses and curricula. One opportune item, apropos of the recent push for learning outcomes assessment across colleges and universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and elsewhere, would be a campaign to institute “reflective thinking” as a standard proficiency goal for the economics major (Freeman 2007; Dekker and Klamer in press; Wight in press). Economics majors are currently expected to acquire threshold proficiencies in micro- and macroeconomic principles, probability and statistics, and certain forms of mathematics. These transferable skills are deemed essential because they enable students to understand, evaluate, construct, and communicate economic arguments. Reflective thinking would be a natural addition to this core skill set, to enable economics majors “to engage differences of opinion, evaluate evidence and form their own grounded judgments about the relative value of competing perspectives” (AAC&U 2006). Moreover, since there is no single, correct way to help students acquire reflective thinking skills, each instructor and department would retain the freedom to craft their own recipes for doing so.

CONCLUSION

Intellectual freedom is a marginalized concept in the community of economics educators, effaced even by writers like David Colander and KimMarie McGoldrick who advocate a greater role for liberal education (Garnett 2009c). Putting this concept on the table opens the door to conversations – congenial and contentious – in which we can discover and expand the common ground we share as college educators. For alongside our enduring disagreements about which theories should be featured in our courses and curricula, economists of every tradition seek to foster students’ intellectual agency, their ability and willingness to “grapple successfully with uncertainty, complexity, and conflicting perspectives and [to] still take stands that are based on evidence, analysis and compassion” as they address “personal and professional decisions and with the major issues of our times” (Nelson 1997: 71).

The persistence of illiberal Samuelsonian norms in economics classrooms and degree programs is an intergenerational stalemate. As Paul Heyne observed two decades ago: None of this is the product of a conspiracy. We are caught in a kind of prisoner's dilemma where almost everyone prefers an outcome that is, unfortunately, in no one's interest to bring about. Teachers present what appears in the textbooks, the textbooks offer what the teachers expect, and the teachers expect what has been in the textbooks for as long as they can remember (Heyne 1995: 150).

Sustainable momentum for liberal education reforms will require a bottom-up movement (department by department) and public support beyond the academy. Such a movement will necessarily comprise a big tent, a diverse community of mainstream and heterodox economists, rife with substantive disagreements yet held together by an awareness of shared purposes. All who believe that "thinking like a liberally educated person" is an integral part of "thinking like an economist" will be well served to pool their efforts. The Samuelsonian status quo is bound to give way, but only after an inclusive community of liberal educators has generated a critical mass of new materials, goals, and expectations for the 21st century econ major.

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