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Review of *Handbook of Teaching Philosophy to Economists*, edited by Giancarlo Ianulardo, John B. Davis and Ricardo F. Crespo, Cheltenham, UK, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2025, 316 pages, ISBN 978-1-03533-681-4

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Over the past century, economics has faced major crises, which have called into question its status as a science and have shaped both its theoretical foundations and how it is practiced today. The book's emphasis on the link between philosophy and economics, as well as on why and how philosophy should be studied by economics students, comes at a pivotal moment in history, echoing Husserl's call for 'the rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy' (Husserl 1970, p. 299). Nearly a century has passed since the onset of the Great Depression (1929-1939), a period historically framed by the two World Wars, and followed, more recently, by the 2008 global financial crisis, that still haunts today's society. This, alongside ongoing political conflicts and the unsettling memory of ecological disasters, threatens economic stability, casting a shadow over Generation Z, projecting it into a future of uncertainty. It is therefore the right time to nurture a philosophical mindset capable of addressing contemporary economic challenges, and to examine how economists' capacity to engage in philosophical reflection can and should be cultivated throughout their university education. It is in this context that the Handbook emerges as an essential instrument for both students and educators. Its purpose is to demonstrate the relevance of philosophical reflection within economics while showing how philosophy can be successfully integrated in the economics curriculum. Beyond being an intellectually stimulating and thought-provoking

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read, the volume's distinctive merit is that, rather than remaining abstract, it provides practical guidance about the teaching of philosophy to economists.

The volume brings together twenty-two studies authored by academics from economics departments at universities worldwide. Considered as a whole, the contributions offer a coherent yet diverse range of perspectives on the topic. By promoting independent thinking and emphasising pluralism (p. 1), the volume steers away from dogmatism, rejecting uncritical reliance on assumptions. Students are thus encouraged to critically examine the inherited premises of economic theory and to apply them with discernment and responsibility in their future professional roles (p. 57), yet this mode of intellectual formation has been in decline for some time. As Marie Daou and Alain Marciano argue, in the past decades, economics has become a science dominated more and more by mathematics, formulas and technical precision, thereby diminishing the philosophical approaches towards it (p. 198). It follows from this that this situation calls for remedy, hence the need for a curricular reform, through which philosophy would have the power to renew economics education.

Despite the clearly articulated premises that are accepted unequivocally, the Handbook preserves an open, non-dogmatic approach, being explicitly pluralistic. Throughout the volume, contributors repeatedly underline that they do not seek to promote a single conception of the kind of philosophy to be taught, nor of how it ought to be taught in universities. Moreover, the editors don't aim to dismantle mainstream economics, 'but to show that these methodologies would benefit from a critical analysis of the implicit assumptions that underpin their discourse' (p. 2). This position recalls Popper's statement that: 'the system must be formulated sufficiently clearly and definitely to make every new assumption easily recognizable for what it is: a modification and therefore a revision of the system' (Popper 2002, p. 50). Some contributors highlight mainstream economics' reliance on the behavioural assumption of rational utility maximisation, suggesting that economic theory should acknowledge the social and cultural dimension of human existence, thus shifting the point of interest from *homo oeconomicus* towards *homo culturalis*, conceived as a person engaged in self-construction (p. 199). This resonates with Carlos Hoevel's observation that 'even graduate students are often unaware

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that the main object of their study is human behaviour' (p. 163). Furthermore, through ecological and 'greening' approaches to economics, Carsten Herrmann-Pillath challenges the mainstream paradigm by questioning its anthropocentric assumptions (Chapter 17).

The volume is structured in two equally covered parts: *Theory* and *Pedagogy*. The division judiciously emphasizes the relationship between philosophical reflection and how it can be integrated into courses and seminars for economists.

The first part dives into a convincing chain of arguments, meant to establish the conceptual legitimacy both of philosophy of economics and that of critical thinking within economics. It wraps around some fundamental questions: *Why should economists engage with philosophy at all and why should students attend to philosophy courses?* The volume demonstrates its adherence to the view that philosophy is a way a thinking rather than something one merely possesses – and this is made clear through several references throughout the book to Kant's view on pedagogy. This creates an implicit framework underlying the entire Handbook, with philosophy being understood as *the* way to intellectual autonomy – much needed in economics. Inspired by Kant's writings, Ianulardo and Stella endorse in Chapter 2 the idea that what matters is to "learn to philosophise" and not "learn philosophy" (p. 15).

The second part addresses a different question: *How can critical thinking and philosophical awareness be cultivated in actual students?* Here, the arguments of the first part are implicitly accepted, so the next natural step is to deal with the pedagogical problems posed by teaching philosophy to economists (especially in several chapters written by Boldyrev, Aydinonat, Vromen and Hoevel). Consequently, the second part revolves around the practical challenges of successfully introducing philosophy into an already overcrowded curriculum, designed for students who typically have limited prior exposure to philosophy and who don't necessarily grasp easily the value of philosophical insight for their field of study and for their future professional lives. The aim of this part of the volume resonates with Dewey's statement: 'education is not an affair of "telling" and being told, but an active and constructive process' (Dewey 1930, p. 46).

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The most significant achievement of the volume lies in its demonstration that philosophical thinking is indispensable for economics students, if they aspire to become autonomous thinkers and successful professionals, who are going to hold on their shoulders the (shared) responsibility for the functioning of a global economy. A further merit of the Handbook rests precisely in what justifies its split structure: the fact that theory doesn't remain isolated, but it is clearly directed towards application in real life pedagogical practice. On top of this, even as it advocates a multidimensional approach, the volume reveals a number of bold positions, through statements such as Hermann-Pillath's claim, advanced in Chapter 17, that 'the solution needs to be radical, beginning with a shift away from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric foundation in the discipline' (p. 219), and Don Ross's explicit call, stated in Chapter 22: 'That word [rationality] should therefore become extinct in the economics classroom' (p. 294).

As Popper famously stated, 'the secret of intellectual excellence is the spirit of criticism: it is intellectual independence' (Popper 2013, p. 127). This observation provides a conceptual lens through which one of the volume's main concerns can be understood, that being the formative role of philosophy in cultivating critical thinking in economists. In this spirit, as Melissa Vergara-Fernández points out, 'to foster rigorous practitioners – academic or not – we need autonomous, creative, and critical thinkers. Philosophical tools are well suited for this endeavour' (p. 271). Moreover, several contributors observe that rigour in economics cannot be equated with rigour in pure mathematics or logic. Since economics involves interpretive judgment, it must be situated within a broader philosophy of science. At the same time, the volume maintains that philosophical reflection strengthens the kind of rigour one finds in economics: 'philosophy training for economists is an effective way to bolster the rigour of the discipline' (p. 271) by 'making students aware of the fact that scientific rigour involves making choices instead of following a method that warrants it' (p. 275).

Confronting students with the absence of definitive answers in philosophy, in contrast to the relative certainty one might find in some areas of economics, is expected to further develop critical thinking. As Domènec Melé cautions, 'a lack of philosophical education may lead to the uncritical acceptance of significant ontological, epistemological, anthropological, and ethical assumptions, potentially resulting in reductionism, errors, misdirection, and even

dehumanization’ (p. 84). This generates a pressing question: *What kind of philosophy should be taught to economists?* The Handbook doesn’t advocate a single, canonical model, but clearly suggests that ‘giving priority to methodological reflection in individual economics courses, and then *supporting it* with a course in the history of the philosophy of science, may be more effective’ (p. 7). Courses like *Philosophy of Economics* (PoE), sometimes called *Economic Methodology* (EM), should facilitate ‘the transition to out-of-the-box thinking’ (p. 152). While the volume does not explicitly recommend introductory courses on the history of philosophy or systematic reading of fundamental philosophical text, there is a broad agreement that PoE courses should be academically rigorous, drawing primarily on philosophy of science and ethics, while also engaging with core philosophical domains such as ontology, logic and epistemology. While classical philosophy is not promoted as a primary curricular objective, contributors nonetheless recognise the benefits of studying classical authors. For instance, Gilles Campagnolo and Emmanuel Picavet suggest that ‘reading Aristotle, Rousseau, Kant, and other classical writers interactively with students is likely to help them gain a clear understanding of the ways in which the so-called “normative” inquiries connect with the study of social structures and mechanisms’ (p. 122).

Another interesting insight of the Handbook is that precisely the notorious distinction in economic theory between positive and normative economics is itself philosophical, demonstrating that at the very basis of economic theory lies philosophical inquiries. Throughout the volume, some contributors acknowledge the strengths of positive economics, while strongly suggesting that, insofar as economics is not a value-free science, ‘economics is and should be a normative discipline’ (p. 110). This perspective is reflected pedagogically by encouraging students to raise philosophical questions about contemporary economic issues (p. 163), as well as about economic theory itself, especially in relation to topics such as the positive-normative dichotomy or utility maximization, the latter being described as ‘a gold mine for philosophising’ (p. 164). Beyond these forms of philosophical discussions, ethical reflection occupies a central place, emerging throughout the Handbook as an essential component of the economist’s *Bildung*. In line with an applied ethics framework, several contributors emphasise the importance of addressing real-

life problems. N. Emrah Aydinonat and Jack Vromen highlight a key pedagogical insight: ‘motivate students using real-world problems and ethics-based arguments’ (p. 153). What is more, a particularly prominent ethical focus is that of ecological concerns within economic theory. Chapter 17 addresses this issue extensively, especially in relation to the ‘ethical goal of making the economy more environmentally friendly’ (p. 215).

Regarding the questions of when and to whom philosophy of economics courses should be taught, the volume offers several perspectives. While some contributors identify master’s and doctoral students in economics as the most appropriate audience for philosophy courses, others argue that philosophical reflection should be introduced as early as the undergraduate level, in order to shape students’ intellectual formation towards critical thinking from the outset. Overall, the Handbook advocates a sustained engagement with philosophy throughout economists’ entire academic formation.

The realities of the curriculum and institutional structures may pose a challenge to the realisation of the philosophical ideal of studying economics. Apart from the curriculum being already *overcrowded*, students may also display *resistance* both to the idea of studying philosophy and to grasping philosophical concepts, a challenge linked to what is described as ‘the lack of education in philosophy among economics students’ (p. 151). Contributors further acknowledge that philosophy of economics courses often occupy a marginal position within the curriculum matrix. Changing this situation is no easy task, as it would require a transformation in the entire mindset of both professors and students. In this respect, the Handbook represents a highly promising point of departure. It highlights the benefits of philosophical thinking regarding economy-related issues, while recognising that the fulfilment of this desideratum requires institutional change alongside attention to pedagogical strategies.

By understanding economics as social philosophy (p. 199), the volume ultimately exceeds the scope of a conventional handbook. It functions as a manifesto, affirming the relevance of philosophy to economics, economists and economy, while calling for meaningful institutional change within universities. Once the relevance of philosophy for economists is acknowledged, it becomes a priority to identify effective ways of teaching it to them, or, more importantly,

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of cultivating their ability to philosophise about economic issues. The volume makes it clear that the philosophy of economics remains isolated in the absence of a well-suited pedagogical method, one that is tailored to students' interests and to the challenges of present-day society. Training in philosophical reflection is expected to develop critical thinking, through which no unexamined belief will be taken for granted, neither in theory nor in practice. The aim is to cultivate deeper and more insightful students, able to better understand and use economic concepts, who will eventually become more responsible professionals, capable of contributing meaningfully to the global economy, regardless of the scale of their individual roles.

Conflict of interest statement

The author declares that this research has no conflict of interest.

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