

Call for Papers

zfwu 23/1 (2022): Objects, Conditions and Possibilities of Ideology Critique in and of Economics

Call for Papers

Deadline: June 1, 2021

A peculiarity of the relationship between ideology and ideology critique is that ideology does not exist as a discrete discipline, and no ideologues serve as representatives of this discipline to determine the object of study. Although the philosopher of enlightenment and liberal economist Destutt de Tracy (1754–1836) once wanted to establish ideology as the “science of ideas” (*science des idées*), this ambitious project failed because of political resistance from restorative forces in postrevolutionary France (Kennedy 1979). No subsequent scholars have taken up this task; consequently, ideology analysis and critique are not considered a unique subject and have no fixed point of reference: socioeconomic conditions, consciousness, scientific and everyday knowledge, culture, practice, patterns of interpretation and discourse were and continue to be considered the subject matter of ideology analysis and critique, which is devoted to the attempt to carve out and criticize the specific ideological dimensions embodied by the respective entities or phenomena. Ideology critique within and of economics includes, but is not limited to, the critique of theories and their assumptions and contents as well as the practical consequences associated with certain approaches. Taking the critical theory perspective (cf. Geuss 1981), one might wonder whether the genesis of economics in general, or of certain subfields within the discipline in particular, can be regarded as “tainted” and whether ideologies can “fall out of time” or “fall into the wrong hands”. Furthermore, do ideologies affect the (de)stabilization of practices, institutions and social orders and, if so, to what extent? For example, do market relations undermine morality (see Kuch 2017)?

This **zfwu** special issue aims to shed light on the role of disciplinary approaches or discipline-specific perspectives in formulating ideology critique—including the critical views on economics that other disciplines take. Accordingly, it can be understood as either internal critique (i.e., self-critique) or external critique (e.g., integrative economic ethics; Ulrich 2008). Referring to Kant’s ethical theory (i.e., the view that human beings, based on reason, do not have to accept the prevailing circumstances of their life), Ulrich (2008: 4) characterizes integrative economic ethics as “unconditional and comprehensive critique of ideology”, unlimited by actual or perceived economic constraints. Drawing from Kantian ethics, Ulrich (2008: 3) reflects on the (often implicit) normative preconditions or foundations of economic theory and practices. Here, ideology critique starts with its object (the market), while the criticizing theory determines what is critical about it. The critique of another discipline, as well as the theories and the practices associated with it, determines the type of critique. In line with this approach, the ideology critique of states of affairs in the social lifeworld is initiated from outside, that is, is external to it.

Another camp in contemporary critical theory does not seek to gain information about the contents and the criteria of (immanent) critique from theory; rather, proponents gain this information from practice, which they conceive of as inherently contradictory (cf. Jaeggi 2006). According to Geuss (1981), a negative or false ideology is indicative of distorted reason. People are not completely mistaken about their consciousness, interests or needs—a prerequisite for immanent critique. Rather, critical theory can gain something, if not everything, from the analysis of people and social constructs themselves—for example, from their ideas and concepts of truth, rationality, freedom or the good life (Geuss 1981: 88).

Economics has endured an extraordinary amount of ideology critique. One reason for this extensive critique is that “economics was born out of philosophy” (Nussbaum 2016: 229), and economics scholars have changed some philosophical ideas and concepts as they integrated them into their field. The narrow concept of rationality (Löhr and Burkatzki 2015; Ulrich 2008), the dichotomization of the positive and the normative (Friedman 1953; Van de Laar and Peil 2009) and economic value theory (Riese 1973; Srinivasan 2016) exemplify this development. Furthermore, contemporary (mainstream) economics, deploying a narrow, one-dimensional approach to rationality, has been criticized for having formulated the claim about its ability to explain phenomena that do not originate from economics (cf. Becker 1976); thus, the field of economics has been exposed to the accusation of imperialism (see Becker 1993; Pies and Leschke 1998).

This special issue aims to explore how a critique of economic practice and theory can and should unfold, be it as a critical discipline or a theory of economics (what role does theory play?), a method in which analysis and critique coincide in a particular way (cf. Jaeggi 2009), a critical understanding in line with Ricoeur (cf. Figal 2009), a recourse to virtuous practice and mode of questioning associated with it (cf. Foucault 1992) or a critique that, reflecting on itself, recognizes itself as insufficient (cf. Geuss 2009) and should therefore change or renew itself. Further questions arise with regard to the interfaces between performativity, economics and social order: What are the foundations for the validity of theories and models? What consequences have emerged from the acceptance of economic theories for assessments of the potential worth of social orders (Müller-Doohm 2017)? Which broader perspectives on what we associate with the economic realm can claim of themselves that they are critical and capable of renewing theories/practices/ideologies? What about a critical theory of economics (cf. Hermann-Pillath 2018)? Is it also a critique of ideology, a status integrative economic ethics can claim for itself?

Although economics is the main focus of this special issue, as comparative analyses of disciplines can generate new insights, we welcome contributions that address other disciplines as well, such as philosophy and the social, natural and life sciences, which link the nature of living with the social (e.g., ecology).

Guest editors of this special issue are Ingrid Becker (University of St. Gallen and Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg) and Michaela Haase (Freie Universität Berlin) and Marc C. Hübscher (Deloitte).

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