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Internationalizing and De-colonizing the Curriculum in Political Science Track

Teaching Political Economy: Multi- and Interdisciplinary Approaches

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1. Introduction

Political economy as a field of study spans the humanities and social sciences, which means it encompasses a wide range of topics and employs a variety of methodological approaches. This intellectual pluralism has led to fruitful scholarly conversations and collaborations different disciplines, institutions, identities and intellectual traditions. Arguably, however, the way political economy is taught has received less attention than the way it is studied and its potential policy applications.

This working paper starts by looking at the history of political economy as a field, its form in the contemporary academy, and the current debates within political economy regarding neoliberalism. It then looks at current trends in programs that are—or might be plausibly characterized as—focused on teaching political economy. I will suggest that these programs can be helpfully characterized as interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, or some combination of the two. I define a multidisciplinary approach to teaching political economy as one that draws on the methods, objects of study and norms of different disciplines, which are then juxtaposed to

produce fresh insights. In contrast, an interdisciplinary approach to teaching political economy self-consciously attempts to combine different disciplines into a single field with its own set of methods and objects of study. Programs of political economy frequently resemble one of these two ideal types, albeit many institutions combine the two basic approaches in a single program, with a “core” of required interdisciplinary courses accompanied by a range of optional courses from across different disciplines.

This working paper suggests that the teaching of political economy should fully embrace both its multi- and interdisciplinary aspects to facilitate conversations between scholars and teachers about what political economy is and should be. Such dialogue will help faculty better understand the effects the neoliberal era has had on the academy itself, thereby aiding both teaching and research. These conversations should also include students and non-academics in the process of remaking a political economy fit for the modern world, thereby enhancing the skills students need to address the pressing issues facing the modern world in their careers. The article closes by sketching possible pitfalls and problems for this attempt to “reintegrate” political economy in the academy, and potential avenues for innovation and collaboration.

2. The Many Lives of Political Economy

What exactly is “political economy” as an academic subject? The answer seems fairly intuitive—the study of the relationship between politics and economics. Whilst this answer is broadly correct, it is a little too simple for our purposes. For example, scholars and teachers frequently make a distinction between classical and contemporary political economy—albeit that the periodization of these can vary—which itself suggests its scope and subject matter may vary over time. This can be seen in the history of the term of “political economy.” It was first used in the

1600s, rose to prominence in the 1700s, faded over the course of the 1900s until it had largely disappeared by World War II, became more prominent again in the 1970s, and then exploded in popularity since the 2008 financial crisis.¹

This shifting prominence suggests that whatever “political economy” is, it is necessarily sensitive to the different social and intellectual contexts within which it operates. A plausible way of narrating the rise, fall, and rise again of political economy is to see it as a central part of the rise of the modern world, and the creation of the modern social sciences. As Heilbroner argued in his classic textbook *The Worldly Philosophers*, the very idea of political economy requires a degree of separation of the “political,” “economic,” and “cultural,” a separation which occurred in Europe during the transition from feudalism into modern forms of liberal-democratic governance.² This great transformation was rooted in the material changes arising with urbanization, industrialization and the creation of (imperialist) nation-states, and the ideas of the classical political economists who both observed and influenced this process.³ These early political economists helped create economics, political science and sociology as distinct disciplines, but nevertheless often saw themselves as philosophers and historians as much as

¹ For a useful discussion of the changing prominence and valence of “political economy,” see Renate Mayntz, “Changing Perspectives in Political Economy,” Max Planck Institute, Discussion Paper 19/6, (2019).

² Robert H Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers: The Lives, Times and Ideas of the Great Economic Thinkers* (Touchstone, 7th Ed., 1999). His basic point is captured on p23, where he states “[A] separate, self-contained economic world has not yet lifted itself from its social context. The world of practical affairs is inextricably mixed up with the world of political, social, and religious life. Until the two worlds separate, there will be nothing that resembles the tempo and feeling of modern life. And for the two to separate, a long and bitter struggle must take place.”

³ Heilbroner *supra* pp.13-14 “The notions of the great economists were world-shaking, and their mistakes nothing short of calamitous.... The evolution of their heretical opinions into common sense, and their exposure of common sense as superstition, constitute nothing less than the gradual construction of the intellectual architecture of much of contemporary life.” See also Karl Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation* (Farrar & Rinehart, 1944) for a deeper analysis (and critique) of this process.

they did social scientists in the modern sense. The fading out of the term political economy over the course of the 1800s and 1900s coincided with the separation in the academy of the humanities from the social and natural sciences, the institutionalization of different disciplines into different departments, and the predominance of economics as a discipline over matters relating to “the economy.” It is therefore unsurprising that political economy has reappeared in the years following the collapse of postwar Keynesianism, increased globalization, and recent democratic, financial and ecological crises. It seems fair to say that this rejuvenated contemporary political economy, however, is a less integrated field than its classical forbearer, as it is located in distinct academic disciplines, departments and schools of thought.⁴ Nevertheless, a common thread running through contemporary political economy is not simply the relationship between politics and economics, but also the questions raised by the predominance of “neoliberal” forms of governance in both the domestic and international spheres since the late 1970s. This concern helps structure contemporary debates within political economy in the academy, forming an important context for understanding the current state of the field.

3. Neoliberalism and the Search for an Alternative Paradigm

It is a commonplace that the neoliberal era of governance is breaking down, and that its opponents need to construct an alternative paradigm to take its place.⁵ Political economy is undergoing a related renaissance in the academy, with many scholars engaged in the process of

⁴ See the introduction to Barma and Vogel’s *The Political Economy Reader Contending Perspectives and Contemporary Debates* (Routledge, 2nd Ed 2022).

⁵ Neil Fligstein and Steven Vogel, “Political Economy After Neoliberalism,” *Boston Review*, 6 Oct 2020.

rethinking the relationships between politics and economics in order to theorize an alternative paradigm. Several programs of political economy have been founded in recent years, such as the undergraduate major in Moral and Political Economy at Johns Hopkins, the undergraduate majors/minors in Politics, Economics and Philosophy at the LSE, Michigan and UNC Chapel Hill, the Law and Political Economy movement originating at Yale, and the Ph.D. in Political Economy at the University of Chicago. More established programs—such as Political Economy at UC Berkeley and Social Studies at Harvard—have also seen increased prominence, funding and enrollment.

While the term “neoliberalism” is contested, it is predominantly used to refer to forms of governance prominent since the late 1970s that attempt to insulate politics and economics from each other. Proponents of neoliberal forms of governance understood in this sense argue separating politics from economics will protect equality, freedom, prosperity and social pluralism.⁶ Critics allege, however, that in practice neoliberalism in all its forms blurs the boundaries between politics and economics by extending the reach of markets both as a form of social organization—primarily through privatization and financialization—and as a form of governing rationality that has altered the way individuals conceive of themselves and their social relations.⁷ For example, the market logic that underlies the “law and economics” movement has not only affected the development of American jurisprudence, but (arguably) also inculcated in the citizenry a disposition to think and act as freely-choosing “consumers” rather than political

⁶ Slobodian’s *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Harvard, 2018) gives a persuasive account.

⁷ See Wendy Brown *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (2015, Zone Books).

equals with substantive obligations to one another.⁸ Likewise, neoliberal claims to have “rolled-back” the state are only partially true, as a reduction of state capacity in traditional areas such as welfare provision has been accompanied by extension of the criminal law and increased enforcement of private property rights.⁹ The “hollowing out”¹⁰ of the welfare state has been accompanied by attacks on policies such as affirmative action, with “social diversity” under the neoliberal paradigm primarily conceptualized as private and individual, rather than as a public good that requires addressing the historical marginalization of certain groups.¹¹

Many of neoliberalism’s most trenchant critics are academics, and neoliberal governance has clearly had profound effects on the funding, orientation, and administration of higher education.¹² Decades of under-investment have eroded the capacity of public institutions to provide quality education and research, which has made it harder to build a concerted opposition to the ensuing changes. An obsession with efficiency conceptualized as “value for money” has meant that “impact” is measured by both institutions and individuals through metrics geared towards economic productivity.¹³ This decades-long trend has arguably reinforced the preeminence of economics as a discipline and the increasing influence of its methods of study on

⁸ David Singh Grewal and Jedediah Purdy, “Introduction: Law and Neoliberalism,” 77 L. & 1. CONTEMP. PROBS. 1 (2015) and Jedediah S. Purdy, David S. Grewal, Amy Kapczynski & K. Sabeel Rahman, “Building a Law-and-Political-Economy Framework: Beyond the Twentieth-Century Synthesis,” 129 *Yale L. J.* 1784 (2020).

⁹ Jamie Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹⁰ RAW Rhodes, “The hollowing out of the state: The changing nature of the public service in Britain,” August 2005 *The Political Quarterly* 65(2):138 – 151.

¹¹ Gerald Torres, “Neoliberalism and affirmative action,” *Cultural Dynamics* 27(1):43-62 (2014).

¹² Beth Mintz, “Neoliberalism and the Crisis in Higher Education: The Cost of Ideology,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (January, 2021).

¹³ See Brown (2015) *supra* Chapter 6, “Educating Human Capital.”

other disciplines, and public policy more broadly.¹⁴ Paradoxically, however, the pressures neoliberalism has placed on the modern academy have cemented the separation of humanities and social sciences into disciplinary silos which—until recently—have tended not to talk to each other, but rather frequently concentrate on internal debates.¹⁵ Overall, therefore, the ascendancy of neoliberal forms of governance have reduced cross-disciplinary exchanges within the academy whilst simultaneously facilitating the economization of research and education more broadly.¹⁶

In this paper I argue that the key to productive conversations in the academy regarding the collapse of the neoliberal paradigm is understanding political economy as simultaneously *multi-* and *inter-*disciplinary. To flesh out this claim, I will expand on what I mean by multi- / inter-disciplinary, briefly survey the current teaching and research of political economy, draw on the lessons learned from my time teaching political economy at Berkeley, and sketch the possible pitfalls and promises of my suggested approach.

4. Multi- and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Political Economy

In the rest of this working paper I will utilize a distinction between what I call multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to the teaching and research of political economy. My definitions do not accord with the common usage of these terms—which are often used interchangeably—but

¹⁴ For useful discussions, see Paul Romer, “The Dismal Kingdom Do Economists Have Too Much Power?” in *Foreign Affairs* March/April 2020, and Dani Rodrik, “Beware Economists. Bearing Policy Paradigms,” *Project Syndicate*, May 11 2021.

¹⁵ While separation of academic institutions into discrete departments predates neoliberalism the increasing specialization and demand for measurable impact has clearly accelerated the siloing process begun by logical positivism in the 1950s. See Robert Adcock and Mark Bevir, “Political Science since World War Two: Americanization and its Limits,” in Roger E. Backhouse and Philippe Fontaine (Eds), *The History of the Social Sciences since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Jacob Soll, “The Economic Logic of the Humanities,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Feb 24, 2014.

is intended to capture a conceptual and practical distinction in the way political economy is approached. The distinction was inspired by debates in the philosophy of social science between interpretivists and positivists, but I wish to stay agnostic here on the substance of that debate.¹⁷

A multidisciplinary approach to political economy sees it as a field of study defined by its objects of analysis rather than a particular methodological approach.¹⁸ These objects of analysis

¹⁷ Nevertheless, I should declare that I personally have an intellectual commitment to interpretivism. My form of interpretivism is based in “meaning holism,” the idea that individual statements or propositions cannot be understood in isolation, but rather must be placed within the wider web of beliefs and practices which sustain them. This approach facilitates both synchronic and diachronic analysis (Bevir & Blakely 2018), making it particularly suited for issues prominent in political economy, particularly as they relate to forms of governance within liberal-democratic nation-states. In my work on liberal nationalism and multiculturalism, for example, I argue the nation can be articulated synchronically, usually as a particular constellation of beliefs, practices and values seen as in some sense necessary for liberal-democratic governance. It can also be articulated diachronically, through a national history emphasizing key events and changes which are often narrated as progress or decay. The two understandings of the nation are typically related: the diachronic history of how the nation came to be in turn authorizes the synchronic claim regarding the current content of national identity, with both used to support/critique current arrangements. In my published work I argue that together the synchronic and diachronic aspects of the nation cause problems for liberal democracy in both theory and practice. For example, any account of national identity at a particular moment in time—no matter how inclusive—necessarily imposes a singular conception on a series of competing visions of the nation (Ashcroft and Bevir 2021). Likewise, any narrative of political or national history must select what to emphasize, which makes any given history an oversimplification of reality driven by particular purposes. Together these synchronic and diachronic aspects necessarily downplay contingency and contestation, rendering contemporary accounts of the nation and its relationship to liberal democracy (whether critical or vindictory) overwhelmingly teleological in structure and homogenizing in effect. These tendencies make it simultaneously easier for elites to co-opt national identities and narratives yet harder for liberal nationalism to gain traction on a complex and contested social reality, as evidenced in the controversy sparked by the New York Times’ 1619 Project.

¹⁸ Renate Mayntz, “Changing Perspectives in Political Economy,” Max Planck Institute, Discussion Paper 19/6, (2019). My form of interpretivism points, however, towards the appropriate methodologies for a reimagined political economy. For example, meaning holism shows social objects are only intelligible in appropriately defined contexts (Bevir 1999) which in this case are most plausibly liberal-democratic institutions in nation-states subject to increasing pressures from globalization. Yet tracking the relationship between liberal democracy, politics and economics, and national identity and cultural diversity in these environments requires engaging social science accounts of democratic development, histories of political traditions and normative political theory, making the project necessarily both inter- and multi-disciplinary. Meaning holism also demonstrates that theory and practice are interrelated, and therefore that justified knowledge requires comparison across similar cases, and engaging with practitioners as well as academics. Comparison will highlight both unique features and commonalities, thereby refining our accounts whilst also grounding general conclusions. My multi- and interdisciplinary approach also allows me to draw concepts from this comparative work to form a framework within which to juxtapose different narratives, translate between disciplines, and create an integrated account.

center on the interactions between politics and economics, including political-economic institutions, actors, policies and practices, and on their micro and macro effects on society, including electoral politics, policy-making (especially regulation), wealth inequality, interest groups, the behavior of firms, and bureaucratic practices. Political economy understood in this way necessarily straddles different academic disciplines, which in turn raises the question of how scholars trained in these different disciplines should engage one another. As I am defining the term, a multidisciplinary approach to political economy self-consciously draws on scholarship across different disciplines, which are put in conversation with one another through cross-disciplinary conversations and collaborations.

A multidisciplinary approach to teaching political economy will therefore see pedagogy as rooted primarily in the underlying departments and disciplines, often requiring students to take courses from a range of departments across the social sciences and humanities. For example, students will take courses in the departments of economics, history, political science and sociology which are relevant to the relationship between politics and economics. Although this approach puts multiple disciplines in conversation with one another, they are still seen as discrete endeavors, with their own set of interests, literatures, norms and methodologies. Multidisciplinary political economy is therefore best understood as a mix of different disciplines which are juxtaposed to produce fresh insights, insights which are then taken by scholars and students to their home departments. As such multidisciplinary political economy is a conglomeration of approaches rather than a single intellectual enterprise.

An interdisciplinary approach to political economy shares with its multidisciplinary cousin a conception of political economy as a field of study. In contrast, however, an interdisciplinary

approach is not content to rely on pre-existing disciplines and methodologies, but rather attempts to combine different disciplines into a field with its own distinctive set of objects of study, norms and methods. An interdisciplinary approach thus does not simply draw on different disciplines and put them in conversation with each other, but rather tries to synthesize the underlying disciplines through these conversations.

An interdisciplinary approach to teaching political economy therefore sees pedagogy as something that must be undertaken primarily “in-house” through courses taught in a self-consciously interdisciplinary manner, typically by scholars with a greater breadth of training in, and experience of, multiple disciplines. For example, students will take courses that do not simply touch on contemporary issues relevant to “political economy” broadly construed, but also trace the historical, philosophical and empirical connections between politics and economics over a longer period. This approach inevitably foregrounds questions regarding the appropriate methods, issues and objects of political economy as a field. As such it often raises deeper issues regarding the philosophy the human sciences, the history of the modern world, and the normative claims embedded in different social theories and practices. Interdisciplinary political economy is therefore best understood as an attempt reintegrate political economy into something more like its more classical form—which combined philosophy, history and the nascent social sciences—while retaining the advances made since the inception of classical political economy, and addressing the pressing issues raised by the disintegration of the neoliberal—and perhaps postwar liberal-democratic—paradigm.¹⁹

¹⁹ Again, these are my own views, but I would argue liberal-democratic governance is in crisis. Across the world it is under pressure, politically from a resurgent populism, economically from deepening inequality, and socially from a breakdown in trust and cohesion. We are clearly in a period of transition, and there are legion accounts

In summary, multidisciplinary approaches to political economy proceed largely through comparing and contrasting different disciplines, whereas interdisciplinary approaches aim at a genuine synthesis of them. Multidisciplinary approaches produce knowledge in the form of a “mosaic” of different disciplines, whereas interdisciplinary approaches aim at integrating these different disciplines to produce a new set of concepts and practices.²⁰

5. Different Approaches to Teaching Political Economy

The conceptual distinction between multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to political economy is useful in analyzing the way it is taught, albeit that many programs straddle the boundaries of these ideal types. As part of my work for the *Network for a New Political Economy* pursuant to a Hewlett Foundation Grant we conducted a review of the research and teaching of political economy at Berkeley and elsewhere. This project is still ongoing, but I summarize our initial—tentative—findings here.

We identified over two hundred and thirty programs across the world that could plausibly

of what we are witnessing, why it is happening, and how we should respond. The varied normative priorities and methodological commitments embedded in these accounts inevitably lead, however, to different narratives of which paradigm is unravelling or reasserting itself. Are we witnessing the end of neoliberalism, or simply its mutation into new forms? Is the rise of populism the last gasp of majority nationalism, or the start of a shift towards more conservative forms of anti-globalization, such as integralism? Is the “backlash” against multiculturalism a temporary phenomenon? Will we see a more “muscular liberalism” at the national and supra-national level going forward? Will the effects of pandemics and climate change become a constant feature of our lives and, if so, what are the implications for domestic and international governance?

²⁰ The mosaic metaphor is drawn from the literature on multiculturalism, where it is used to describe the Canadian model. It is tempting to articulate the interdisciplinary approach as a US-style “melting-pot” in contrast to the “mosaic” of multidisciplinary work, but perhaps the better multicultural metaphor is the one drawn from Trinidadian multiculturalism of a “callaloo stew” where the different ingredients are blended together into a single dish which nevertheless contains distinct ingredients that work in harmony. For a fuller discussion of this metaphor, see Viranjini Munasinghe, “The Cunning of Multiculturalism: A Perspective from the Caribbean,” in Richard T. Ashcroft and Mark Bevir (Eds), *Multiculturalism in the British Commonwealth: Comparative Perspectives on Theory and Practice* (Oakland: The University of California Press, 2019).

be described as “political economy,” even if that was not the title of the program. Our primary focus was on Europe and the United States, in part because of the much higher concentration of universities in these areas, and in part because of the language barriers inherent in this type of project. I am, however, currently working with undergraduates at UC Berkeley and with Glory Liu at Johns Hopkins to expand the reach of this project beyond the Anglophone world to include more programs from Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. The overwhelming majority of the programs surveyed are in North America, but nevertheless we were able to examine political economy at several significant non-American institutions, such as Oxford, Cambridge, LSE, Kings College London and Sciences Po, and the Universities of Milan, Bologna, Barcelona and Madrid.

I set out below a rough typology of the programs, and then select examples to stand in for each, which provides the simplest way to compare them. I would like to point out, however, that this typology should be understood as a heuristic device rather than a strict classificatory system, and some programs contain elements of more than one “type.” I would also point out the information was provided by undergraduate RAs working during the COVID lockdown, and therefore there will inevitably be omissions and inaccuracies at this stage of the project. Nevertheless, I believe the typology highlights key distinctions between the programs which are helpful for understanding how to reimagine the research and teaching of political economy.

Type 1: Social Theory and History

This approach is predominantly interdisciplinary rather than multidisciplinary, taught mainly (but not entirely) through the program’s own core courses. There is some training in modern social science methodologies, but this can be done “in-house” and is typically complemented by historical, philosophical, and (sometimes) anthropological approaches. These programs are often

organized around core courses that track key aspects of western political thought, albeit with attempts to problematize the idea of "the Canon" as part of the process. These core courses are complimented by varied and changing courses on "special topics" in social and political theory, often taught in small seminar settings. Students learn about processes of globalization, but there are not necessarily area-studies or language requirements, although both can be created by the student to fulfill a requirement to design their own field of study, which will often rely partially on courses outside the program. Harvard's Degree in Social Studies, which has its own administrative staff, dedicated lecturer pool and many joint tenure-track appointments (split between Social Studies and other departments) would seem to be predominantly interdisciplinary, albeit that students can tailor their program in ways that push it closer to Type 2.²¹ The Type 1 approach predominates in liberal arts settings—particularly those with "Great Books" programs—although some liberal arts colleges (such as Pomona) adopt the Type 3 PPE model,²² and those programs that emphasize international affairs, such as Lafayette College, adopt something closer to Type 2.²³

Type 2: Domestic and International Political Economy

These programs employ a mix of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches, with a balance of their own core courses and courses from different departments. There is usually the ability for students to tailor a particular area focus and / or to select from a short menu of premade concentrations. The focus of the programs can vary. Some, such as International Studies

²¹ Details can be found here: <https://socialstudies.fas.harvard.edu/concentration-requirements>

²² Details can be found here: <https://www.pomona.edu/academics/departments/philosophy-politics-economics/philosophy-politics-economics-program-courses-requirements>

²³ Details can be found here: <https://internationalaffairs.lafayette.edu/program/>

at Johns Hopkins, focus on IPE,²⁴ whereas others, such as Political Economy at Tulane, lean more towards domestic matters.²⁵ The “international” programs tend to have a greater area studies / comparative component, which can be accompanied by language requirements. The main methodological thrust is drawn from the empirical social sciences, which is supplemented by history, law, and political theory/philosophy. The methodological diversity of these programs can vary, with most containing a balance of economics, political science, philosophy and sociology, but with some favoring one of those over the others.

Type 3: Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (‘PPE’)

PPE programs are predominantly multidisciplinary rather than interdisciplinary, with almost all courses being taught within the separate departments of Philosophy, Political Science, and Economics. The core courses provided directly by the program are typically limited to an Introductory and then Capstone Seminar. Students usually maintain something of a balance between courses in the three constitutive departments, although this varies by program. When specialization happens, it tends (with some exceptions) to be in a pre-made "track" which emphasizes one discipline above the others, rather than a self-created field of study. Methodological training is acquired through socialization into the three disciplines, and thus is not necessarily fully integrated.²⁶ The methodological balance will vary by program. Some are

²⁴ Details can be found here: <https://krieger.jhu.edu/internationalstudies/undergraduate/requirements/>

²⁵ Details can be found here: <https://murphy.tulane.edu/undergraduate/required-courses>

²⁶ PPE programs will often describe themselves as interdisciplinary, but by this they mean something closer to a sophisticated multidisciplinary approach rather than an interdisciplinary one as I have defined it here. Even where there is a common or unifying methodological approach, this is not necessarily interdisciplinary per se, as it will often be an approach derived primarily from a particular discipline. For example, rational choice / game theory provides a common approach for many PPE programs, but this is itself an extension of economic methods into other disciplines rather than a synthesis of methodologies.

more philosophy / history heavy, whereas others are strongly quantitative / mathematical, and thus stress public choice, game theory and behavioral approaches. These differences are likely related to the type of institution, the location of the program within the institution, the sources of funding, and the size of the program. For example, PPE at Michigan has approximately sixty students, which gives it more flexibility and the ability to utilize smaller seminars for its Introduction and Capstone courses,²⁷ whereas PPE at the University of Pennsylvania is one of the largest majors in the College of Arts and Sciences, and therefore its “core” courses often contain upwards of two hundred students.²⁸

Comparison of Programs

A key take-away from our survey is that, rather than a free-standing attempt to reach the right balance of multi- and interdisciplinary approaches for studying political economy, the structure of most programs is a compromise born of intellectual commitments, institutional constraints, and (arguably) sources of funding. The intellectual commitments come through clearly in the choice of methodologies—qualitative, quantitative, philosophical, historical, empirical—foregrounded in each program. For example, Chicago’s new political economy Ph.D. program predominantly applies the methods of economics to political phenomena, whereas other programs instantiate a wider range of methodologies.²⁹ Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of the programs surveyed contained multi- and interdisciplinary aspects which roughly map onto Types 1-3 listed above, albeit that many programs straddle two of these types.

²⁷ Details can be found here: <https://lsa.umich.edu/ppe/students/concentration-requirements.html>

²⁸ Details can be found here: <https://ppe.sas.upenn.edu/study/curriculum/core-courses>

²⁹ Details can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/436m676r>

The type of institution within which the program is situated also matters. For example, the ability to concentrate undergraduate education in smaller seminar settings tends to be associated with more self-consciously interdisciplinary approaches to political economy than at institutions which utilize bigger survey courses across different departments, and thus stress multidisciplinary. This is especially true in the US, which has not only a greater number of tertiary institutions, but a much wider array of kinds (e.g. public vs private universities, and research universities vs liberal arts colleges). It is also apparent that the national context can have effects, even if these are subtle. For example, the uptake of the new CORE curriculum in economics seems to have been faster in the UK than the US, in part because first-year economics students in the UK have typically had greater math preparation than their peers in the US, in part because the prominence of PPE at Oxford means economics teaching has a longer history of being connected to other disciplines, and in part because A-level students frequently choose to combine STEM, social science and humanities subjects.³⁰ Nevertheless, it would be far too simplistic to suggest that the differences between the programs can simply be put down to different national contexts, in part because of transnational links between the different institutions. For example, Sciences Po offers dual degrees with a number of institutions, including the LSE and UC Berkeley, and so there are some similarities in the way different institutions structure their programs.³¹

Lastly, and without prejudice towards any particular approach or program, existing research agendas on the part of faculty can affect the structure and content of programs, albeit

³⁰ Interview with Professor Martha Olney, UC Berkeley July 2021.

³¹ Details can be found here: <https://www.sciencespo.fr/psia/content/dual-degree-london-school-economics.html>

that this is not independent of other factors. For example, the programs located in the Mercatus Center at George Mason and the Murphy Institute at Tulane lean towards more pro-market approaches, whereas the Michigan PPE program led by Elizabeth Anderson adopts a more critical view of the role of markets fundamentalism, as does the Political Economy program at UC Berkeley. In contrast, the University of Pennsylvania PPE program is connected to the Behavioral Ethics Lab and Social Norms Group, led by Cristina Bicchieri—a behavioral psychologist as well as a philosopher—leading to differences from other PPE programs in the way it is structured.

6. Pitfalls and Promises

In this section I sketch potential problems for the burgeoning field of political economy, as well as possible avenues for productive collaboration. Again, these observations are preliminary, and are based on my own experiences in the *Network for a New Political Economy* and undergraduate major at UC Berkeley. As such, they are partial, tentative and no doubt biased, and should be understood as an invitation for further discussion rather than a set position, general account of the state of the field, or critique of any existing programs.

While many of neoliberalism's most trenchant critics are academics, as discussed above the neoliberal era of governance has nevertheless had profound effects on the funding, orientation, and administration of higher education. A major difficulty for the project of building an alternative to neoliberalism, however, is that the totalizing logic functions as a background assumption which structures intellectual and political life, even for its opponents. This can be seen within the academy. For example, some "centrist" critics of neoliberal political economy reject market fundamentalism in favor of a "mixed" approach that tries to balance the use of efficient markets with government regulation and redistribution. In contrast, more "radical"

critics of neoliberalism reject the mixed approach, arguing that no amount of government intervention can alter the fact that market efficiency is a mirage used to gloss over inequality and oppression. There is thus a potential tension between the two main critiques of neoliberal political economy, which is largely hidden by the existing siloing of the humanities and social sciences, and the disparity of funding between different disciplines, departments, and institutions. This disconnect encourages both “centrists” and “radicals” to focus on their own particular critiques of neoliberal political economy rather than see this as a shared project. A reimagined political economy must therefore be able to put critics and defenders of contemporary political and economic institutions across different disciplines into fruitful conversation with each other. In so doing, political economy will be better able to tackle the full range of empirical and normative questions relevant to the current moment, whilst also being flexible enough to respond to the consequences of the breakdown of the current paradigm of governance.³²

One of the key aims of the *Network* was to foster interaction between different departments and disciplines across the social sciences, humanities and law. Our primary mechanism for

³² Drawing on Kuhn (1962) I would argue the very nature of paradigm shifts foreclose settled knowledge of what comes next, which mean we must be circumspect in our normative theorizing and flexible in our policy prescriptions. When analyzing the “crisis” of liberal democracy across the world I suggest we should be suspicious of narratives that prioritize particular “types” of explanations, as these are likely to simplify the causes of our current turmoil. For example, accounts of globalization which focus on the nation-state and above fail to engage directly issues of democratic legitimacy within and below it (Rodrik 2010), and critiques of human rights which focus on economic rights and neoliberalism downplay cultural rights and multiculturalism (Moyn 2018). My approach suggests that these prominent accounts are partial or incomplete but nevertheless contain important their insights, which need to be drawn out thorough careful comparison, contextualization, and interdisciplinary work. I suggest that what is required is a reorientation of our narratives, theories and practices to be more provisional and epistemically cautious in order mitigate the risk of reinscribing the very tensions within and between liberal democracy, national identity and cultural diversity that led to the current moment. See Ashcroft, R.T., Bevir, M, “Brexit and the Myth of British National Identity,” *British Politics* 16, 117–132 (2021) for a version of this argument.

generating these conversations were a series of panels and talks which were supplemented by internal and external meetings and interviews. Most of our panels were comprised of scholars from different departments, which highlighted potential shortcomings in approaching an issue from the perspective of only one discipline. This was particularly apparent in our panel on climate change. For example, it became clear that policy analysis in the social sciences is geared towards policy regimes within nation-states subject to regular democratic elections, and thus were ill-suited to addressing a global issue that will require decades-long policy solutions. Similarly, it was clear that the standard ways of measuring outcomes in economics push interventions towards policies that can be measured in monetary terms. Even where this bias is acknowledged, it is often seen as a technical hurdle to be overcome rather than something that also raises normative issues of distribution and/or cultural bias. Finally, it was interesting to note that where alternative forms of measurement are being developed within economics, only a subset of those filter out to other disciplines. For example, Sen's work on development as freedom is well known in political theory and philosophy, but this framework was not referenced explicitly by the economists.

Another key lesson was that most pressing contemporary problems raise both empirical and normative issues, which makes cross-disciplinary conversations regarding political economy more complicated. For example, in our panel on race and political economy it became clear that despite a shared normative commitment to addressing the effects of continuing racism, the norms of different disciplines suggested different practical interventions, with some gravitating towards top-down policy solutions and others favoring forms of resistance starting at a more local level. The difficulty of cross-disciplinary discussion was present even when panels focused

on more overtly normative concerns and thus seemed to have more overlap. For example, Elizabeth Anderson's talk and our panels on race and gender all touched on Marx, Weber and Polanyi, and almost all of our panels appealed to core liberal-democratic values such as equality and freedom. Yet as one of the few people present at every talk it became apparent to me that the use of the same terms and thinkers can hide the ways in which these are subtly conditioned by unexpressed philosophical commitments and disciplinary norms. Bluntly put, the terms "equality," "justice," and "freedom" are oft-invoked, but rarely analyzed, and the interpretation of canonical thinkers in different disciplines is understandably different. These factors could potentially lead to miscommunications across disciplinary boundaries which are hidden by similarities in terminology or shared focus on specific thinkers.

A point of commonality in our panels was the importance of identity to the current moment. While different panels and disciplines foregrounded different types of identity—racial, ethnic, gender, cultural, class, national—it was always present in some form, whether articulated as a cause of our current problems, or simply a symptom of underlying political or economic issues.³³ Just as identity is considered central to the problems we face, many of our panelists see it as part of the solution, arguing we must evolve liberal-democratic governance by aiding existing minorities, challenging problematic social constructions of identity, or actively constructing more inclusive shared identities. Whatever form a reimagined political economy takes it seems clear it must involve not just a rebalancing of state/markets and politics/economics, but also a deeper engagement with cultural diversity and the legacies of historical exclusion based on identity. The

³³ For a useful discussion of the ways neoliberalism has or could "mutate" in relation to identity see William Callison and Zachary Manfredi "Theorizing neoliberalism," in Callison and Manfredi (Eds), *Mutant Neoliberalism: Market Rule and Political Rupture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

difficulty this poses, however, is understanding the complex interactions of different forms of identity in a deeply globalized and multicultural world, and the underlying narratives through which we make sense of these. Doing so would require complementing social scientific studies of identity rooted in quantitative methods with historical approaches capable of contextualizing different forms of identity and philosophical analysis of their normative import.

As well as involving academics, many of our panels drew on the expertise of practitioners, including social campaigners involved in the fight for a fair minimum wage, policy experts on economics and big tech, and journalists involved in current affairs and social justice campaigns. The different perspectives brought to these panels made it clear that a reimagined political economy must draw on knowledge outside of the academy if it is to understand fully the relevant problems. These discussions with practitioners also foregrounded the importance of a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between theory and practice, and the way ideas (and ideologies) are reproduced over time and transmitted through society. Developing long-term relationships with activists and journalists will therefore form a crucial part of academic political economy, as will public-facing work.

Our discussions regarding the teaching of political of economy emphasized that education is another crucial avenue for disseminating knowledge. In particular, syllabi and textbooks clearly play a crucial role in both socializing scholars into particular disciplines and the perception of those disciplines in wider society. This has sparked a series of conversations about how to teach canonical political and economic thought—the subject of a roundtable I have organized at this conference—which are themselves a subset of ongoing conversations about how to decolonize and internationalize the curriculum. In terms of textbooks, the CORE project has made important

strides in reframing the way economics is taught in many institutions but has been criticized for an overall lack of methodological pluralism and western bias.³⁴ This raises the interesting question of what a textbook designed specifically for current political economy would look like, and how it should be created.³⁵ I suggest that creating a truly interdisciplinary textbook for political economy—either as a free-standing exercise or as an extension of the CORE initiative—is a vital part of creating and propagating a new form of political economy, and that this can only be done effectively through collaboration between scholars and teachers located across a wide range of institutions and disciplines.

7. Conclusion: Reintegrating Political Economy

Many scholars have argued that productive social change is often characterized by borrowing from adjacent fields to create new understandings, but have also highlighted the dangers of doing this carelessly.³⁶ Multidisciplinary conversations regarding political economy must therefore be

³⁴ For a series of helpful discussions on pedagogy in economics, on textbooks, and re CORE, see: Samuel Bowles and Wendy Carlin, “What Students Learn in Economics 101: Time for a Change,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 2020, 58(1), 176–214; Howard Read, “Rip it up and start again: the case for a new economics,” *Prospect* April 13 2018; Diane Coyle, “In defence of the economists,” *Prospect* April 13 2018; Leonardo Conte, “Deliberate Misunderstandings in Economics: What Pluralism Really Means,” *Rethinking Economics*, <https://www.rethinkeconomics.org/journal/professorpluralism/>; Andrew Mearman, Danielle Guizzo & Sebastian Berger, “Whither Political Economy? Evaluating the CORE Project as a Response to Calls for Change in Economics Teaching,” *Review of Political Economy*, 30:2, 241-259; and Ingrid Harvold Kvangraven and Surbhi Kesar “Standing in the Way of Rigor? Economics’ Meeting with the Decolonizing Agenda,” May 2021, Working Paper 10/2021, Department of Economics, The New School for Social Research.

³⁵ A related issue is the purpose of education within liberal democracy. Is it to produce engaged citizens, skilled workers, or a common identity with which to underpin liberal-democratic politics? How are technological and demographic changes part of this story, and how have they affected higher education, shared identity, and social exclusion? More generally, we need to ask what other internal reforms must take place within the modern university, and under what conditions these be likely to succeed. How should the current academy help to bring about and support the creation of a new political economy through its educational mission? How can we reach across disciplinary, institutional, and generational boundaries in productive ways?

³⁶ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1962), Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), and David Singh Grewal, “The Epicycles of General Equilibrium Theory,” 86 *Law and Contemporary Problems* 25-51 (2024).

supplemented by genuinely interdisciplinary approaches that can mitigate miscommunication, and continue to break down the current siloing of the humanities and social sciences. This is particularly important for a post-neoliberal political economy, which needs to move beyond critique of neoliberalism and rejection of market fundamentalism towards the creation of a positive vision for society. As suggested above, to be truly *inter-* rather than just *multi-*disciplinary political economy must bridge the methods and norms instantiated in different disciplines to create a new set of understandings. Partnerships between scholars in different disciplines can facilitate a detailed engagement with a particular topic or problem from more than one perspective, thereby allowing a sophisticated comparison and integration of different methodological approaches.

Speaking across disciplinary boundaries comes with a substantial risk, however, of miscommunication, the existence or extent of which is not necessarily apparent at the time. Simply borrowing ideas from other disciplines is insufficient, as removing concepts from their contexts will inevitably change their meaning in unforeseen ways. I therefore suggest that cross-disciplinary dialogue is not enough by itself but must be accompanied by a self-conscious attempt to build a “lingua franca” for political economists. As noted above, there are potential disagreements which are currently being obfuscated by a shared rejection of the existing paradigm. The creation of a genuine common language will not in itself eradicate disagreements, but it can clarify precisely what they are, and at least open up the possibility of resolving them. Papering over intellectual disagreements within the academy is likely to be unproductive in the long-term, and even if the different critics and proponents of neoliberalism cannot reach total agreement, an interdisciplinary political economy would facilitate fruitful collaboration where

possible, and respectful disagreement where it is not.

Creating a shared vocabulary for a political economy will require careful conversation, comparison and translation. Expertise in mixed methods and the philosophy of the human sciences are vital for this task, as are a vibrant research community and set of programs in political economy across different institutions. Input to this process must reach beyond tenure-track faculty, however, to include adjuncts, graduate students and undergraduates, who have borne the brunt of the financial strain on higher education. The creation of a reimagined political economy must reckon with the long-term effects of neoliberalism on the academy itself, which will require mitigating countervailing institutional incentives by restructuring curricula, funding, and opening up more pathways to graduation, employment or promotion.³⁷ Multi- and interdisciplinary conversations regarding political economy should therefore involve all levels of the academy, not just as passive recipients of funding or the beneficiaries of pedagogical reforms, but as active participants in the creation of a reimagined political economy itself. This political economy must therefore try to avoid artificial disconnections between theory and practice by also reaching beyond the academy to include practitioners, activists and the wider public in these conversations.

Cross-disciplinary dialogue and collaboration is vital to build an interdisciplinary political economy to complement the multidisciplinary approach that has predominated in previous decades. As is commonly acknowledged, the problems facing the modern world—including

³⁷ The current curriculum review of the Political Economy Undergraduate Program, the creation of a Designated Emphasis at the Graduate level, the new Berkeley Economy and Society Initiative, and an improved UC-wide contract for non-tenure track faculty—partly negotiated by lecturers in our Political Economy Program—have started this process at Berkeley, but more needs to be done.

climate change, wealth inequality, the ongoing legacies of empire, and the rise of exclusionary forms of populism and nationalism—do not respect disciplinary or geographical borders, and it therefore seems our response as political economist cannot either. A greater emphasis on the interdisciplinary aspects of political economy will help form a bridge between different academic disciplines, and between an academy currently being painted—fairly or not—as out of touch with the lived experiences of our students and broader debates in the public sphere. A combined multi- and interdisciplinary approach to research and teaching may thereby push political economy closer to its “classical” form—which spanned philosophy, history and the nascent social sciences—whilst also retaining the insights and rigor of the modern social sciences.

The reintegration of political economy is not, however, simply a scholarly endeavor, technical puzzle, or exercise in coalition-building. Nor is it merely a combination of these things. The reintegration of a political economy is also a normative undertaking. Any attempt to build a new paradigm must ensure that the methods it employs, and the common language it constructs, are inclusive of different voices and sensitive to issues of social justice. A reimagined political economy must set out a positive vision for society, just as neoliberal thinkers such as Hayek and Friedman did. Yet this vision must be able to address the historical legacies of exclusion and social pluralism that neoliberalism either ignored or engaged with superficially. A new political economy must therefore be able to narrate itself—and its differences from neoliberalism—in a simple and persuasive fashion. An overarching narrative of the current moment—where we are, how we got here, and what might be done in response—would therefore also seem to be part of the task of a new political economy. Not only will this require a continuation of the burgeoning intellectual history of neoliberalism, it will require this intellectual history to be articulated in the

classroom and public-sphere to compete with the other—frequently oversimplifying and intolerant—metanarratives vying for attention.³⁸

Political economy should be the meeting point for a wide range of approaches, views and identities both inside and outside the academy, and thus requires an open, honest and reflective series of conversations. These conversations, and the language we must create to conduct them, should aim at moving beyond existing intellectual and social divisions—and assumed divisions of labor—towards a reintegrated political economy in both theory and practice. Yet this integrated political economy must guard against becoming monolithic and lapsing into new forms of orthodoxy. Scholars and teachers must try to harness the extraordinary variety of thought and practice that exists in our classrooms and beyond, and acknowledge the pluralism that is a fundamental fact of modernity. By opening ourselves to the radical diversity of belief and practice through which individuals and communities continue to remake themselves in the face of ongoing political, economic and cultural struggles, we can move forward without becoming disconnected from the past, and address global challenges without ignoring more local issues. If we do so, we may start to address the underlying tensions in our own thought and practice, and create a form of political economy fit for the world to come.

³⁸ See Ben Jackson, “Intellectual Histories of Neo-Liberalism and their Limits,” in Aled Davies, Ben Jackson, and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite (Eds), *In the Neoliberal Age? Britain since the 1970s* (London: UCL Press, 2021).