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Social Economics: Organizations

John B. Davis

Marquette University, john.davis@marquette.edu

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PHILLIP ANTHONY O'HARA

social economics: organizations

In the contemporary scene, social economics tends to center around three main organizations: the Association for Social Economics (ASE), the International Center for Social Economics (ICSE), and the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE). Each of these is discussed below.

Association for Social Economics

The Association for Social Economics was founded in 1941 as the Catholic Economics Association, with a membership drawn largely from US Catholic colleges and universities. Its journal, the *Review of Social Economy*, was first published in 1942. Early papers focused on the application of Catholic social doctrine to economics, the role of social values in the economy and in economics, social justice and contemporary issues of socioeconomic organization (such as labor relations, unions, employ-

ment, social security, credit policy, the Federal Reserve and postwar reconstruction). Though early contributors were influenced by neoclassical economists, solidarism, a theoretical orientation critical of neoclassical economics with origins in the work of Heinrich Pesch and Goetz Briefs in interwar Germany, became increasingly influential. Members of the ASE tended to reject liberalism and laissez-faire, and argued for a social market economy and an economic process embedded in the larger living context of society.

In 1970 the members of the Association elected to give up their strict identification with Catholic social thought, and gave the organization its current name to reflect the increasingly pluralistic character of its membership. The organization grew to include institutionalists, Marxists and secular humanists, who favored an emphasis on social values in economics and who developed new arguments regarding the socially-embedded and value-laden character of the economy and economics. In the Association's new constitution, the organization's objectives are to "foster research and publication centered on the reciprocal relationship between economic science and broader questions of human dignity, ethical values, and social philosophy...to consider the personal and social dimensions of economic problems...and to assist in the formulation of economic policies consistent with a concern for ethical values a...pluralistic community and the demands of personal dignity."

The quarter-century of publication in the *Review of Social Economy* and the *Forum for Social Economics* since 1970 has continued an emphasis on social values and pluralism. More recent contributors include post-Keynesians, feminists, environmentalists, cooperativists, methodologists and behaviorialists. Since 1995 the *Review* has been published quarterly by Routledge in London, which also sponsors the "New Developments in Social Economics" book series.

International Center for Social Economics

The ICSE was founded in 1986, and supports

research examining the relationship between income distribution and economic growth, as well as the manner in which they influence and are influenced by cultural factors and social institutions. The Center was founded by Y.S. Brenner (Utrecht University), H. Deleeck (University of Antwerp/UFSIA), A. Hirsch (Brooklyn College/CUNY), H. Kaelble (Free University of Berlin), W.J. Samuels (Michigan State University), P. Scholliers (Free University of Brussels), I. Stone (Baruch College/CUNY), T. van Tijn (Utrecht University) and the late J. Tinbergen.

The ICSE cooperates with Brooklyn College/CUNY, Baruch College/CUNY, The Center for Social Policy/University of Antwerp/UFSIA and the Center for Contemporary Social History/Free University of Brussels. The Center has hosted a number of conferences, among them several together with the Belgian-Dutch Association of Post-Keynesian Studies, and the founding meeting of the International Confederation for the Reform of Economics (ICARE).

The ICSE coordinates research to structure the efforts of participating scholars from the social and cultural sciences. Issues focused upon include empirical analyses of income distribution, income distribution theories, linkages between income and wealth distribution, empirical testing of distribution theories, the significance of income distribution to social policy, economic growth and the role of institutions, technological choice in relation to income distribution, the international distribution of income, and ethical aspects of income distribution. The results of some of these studies have been published in the *Journal of Income Distribution*, which was founded for this purpose in 1990. The editors at time of writing are Y.S. Brenner, M. Bronfenbrenner and W.J. Samuels. The publisher is JAI Press/UK, and the managing editor is J.T.J.M. van der Linden.

The *Journal of Income Distribution* aims to facilitate communication and discussion of research in the field of social economics and particularly in the sphere of the distribution of income and wealth. Its intention is to provide

an international forum for the dissemination of the results of scholarly work in this field.

Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics

SASE (founded in 1989) is an international, interdisciplinary organization with members in over 50 countries. The academic disciplines represented in SASE include economics, sociology, political science, management, psychology, law, history and philosophy. The membership of SASE also includes business people and policy makers in government and international organizations. SASE's honorary fellows include Pierre Bourdieu, Mary Douglas, Amitai Etzioni, John Kenneth Galbraith, John Gardner, Albert O. Hirschman, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Amartya Sen, Herbert Simon and Neil Smelser.

The purpose of SASE is threefold: (1) to advance an encompassing understanding of economic behavior across a broad range of academic disciplines; (2) to support intellectual exploration and policy implications of economic behavior within the context of psychological, societal, institutional, historical, philosophical and ethical factors; and (3) to balance inductive and deductive approaches to the study of economic behavior at both micro and macro levels of analysis.

Socioeconomics is an emerging meta-discipline. Socioeconomics begins with the assumption that economics is not a self-contained system, but is embedded in society, polity and culture. Socioeconomics regards competition as a subsystem encapsulated within a societal context that contains values, power relations, and social networks. The societal context both enables and constrains competition. Socioeconomics further assumes that individual choices are shaped by values, emotions, social bonds and moral judgments rather than by narrow self-interest. There is no a priori assumption that people act rationally or that they only pursue self-interest or pleasure.

Methodologically, socioeconomics regards inductive studies as co-equal in standing with deductive ones. Socioeconomics is both a

positive and a normative science. That is, it openly recognizes its policy relevance and seeks to be self-aware of its normative implications rather than maintain the mantle of an exclusively positive science. Socioeconomics does not entail a commitment to any one ideological position, but is open to a range of positions that share a view of treating economic behavior as involving the whole person and all facets of society.

See also:

community; ethics and morality; humanistic economics; justice; social economics: history and nature; social economics: major contemporary themes; value judgments and world views

JOHN B. DAVIS

social economics: history and nature

Economics is a child of the Enlightenment. Social economics is an alternative to it, and older. Mainstream economics is a mixture of philosophical assumptions and scientific devices originating out of the social philosophy of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France and Britain. For example, in the elementary principles courses teachers use the analytic geometry of Descartes to explain supply and demand; the intermediate and higher levels use the calculus of Leibniz and Newton. Its philosophical assumptions imply that the whole economy works effectively and harmoniously because it is an equilibrating stationary flow mechanism governed by natural physical laws analogous to Newton's solar system. Assumed also is the natural social law mentioned by Adam Smith that individuals making economic decisions are motivated by self-love, and that this self-interested behavior is held in check by another natural phenomenon, effective competition.

These assumptions and heuristic devices

help to form an Enlightenment-based conception of an economy that is believed to be efficient and equitable if property claims to land and resources are equitable to begin with. Conventional economists will admit that this model may not always work well in the real world; there may be serious obstacles such as "market failures" (externalities and public goods) and imperfections due to interferences from monopolists and governments. But, with all its limitations, they accept it as a benchmark for public policy. The ideal is delineated as one leading to Paretian optimality, a state of maximum economic utility or welfare.

Social economists' complaint against this conventional viewpoint is not so much that the assumptions are false; most social economists would admit that there are natural physical laws applicable to social phenomena. What is wrong with it is that it is narrow, incomplete and too individualistic. Completely unacceptable is the assumption that the final cause or end of the economy is the maximization of utility: that is, the purpose of an economy is to achieve the greatest amount of material welfare. Most social economists assume a different end, as did the ancient Greeks who were the first to study the economy seriously.

Provisioning of the community

The very terms "economy" and "economics" as used by Xenophon and Aristotle in the second century BC indicate a substantive difference in social philosophy. The word "economics" was derived from two Greek words, *oikos* (household) and *nemein* (to rule). The study of the economy to the Greeks was one of ruling or managing a household writ large, a view radically different from the prevailing one of effective markets operating by impersonal forces of supply and demand. To Aristotle, the purpose of an economy is to control the provisioning of the community. As summarized by Karl Polanyi, Aristotle's assumptions pre-ordering the direction of economic activity were COMMUNITY ("man's economy is, as a rule, submerged in his social relations"), self-sufficiency (first priority is the