

Review of Alon Kadish and Keith Tribe (eds), *The Market for Political Economy: The Advent of Economics in British University Culture, 1850-1905*

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Introducing his contribution on W.S. Jevons, Prof. Collison Black neatly summarises the theme of this book, that of understanding the process of change:

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, none of those thinkers in Britain who were advancing the study of political economy were doing so from academic chairs in the subject - with the sole exception of Malthus after 1805. At the beginning of the twentieth century almost all such British thinkers held chairs of economics or political economy (Collison Black in Kadish and Tribe, 1993, p. 162).

This volume has its origins in an international comparative project, launched in 1982 and covering countries in Europe, North America, and later, Japan, which examined the development and institutionalisation of political economy and its emergence in the 19th century as the pre-eminent social science. Emphasis was to be given to the social element in the history of ideas - the way in which the teaching and dissemination of economics responded to the needs and demands of the closed society of the university with its academic and administrative constraints, and to the wider society with the demands made (or not made, as the case may be) upon it by potential employers of qualified economists. National studies revealed a degree of concurrence in the development of the subject and certainly laid to rest any casually held view that academic economics had "taken off" in Britain earlier than elsewhere.

Unfortunately it proved difficult to move from the level of the national studies to the hoped-for international comparative analysis which was to provide "fresh insights into the development of the discipline as an international phenomenon" (p. ix). A number of country studies, printed separately, represent the outcome of this ambitious project.

The "British" leg of the project has resulted in eight essays on organisations offering higher education in the latter part of the 19th century. A quick glance at the table of contents leaves the reader puzzled: are the mainly English institutions listed there to be taken as representative of higher education in Scotland, Wales and a large part of Ireland during the period? How is it that there is a chapter on London University (covering only University and King's Colleges), and a separate one on the London School of Economics (LSE) that only hints at the School's incorporation into the University? There is so much which the Introduction could and should have done in clearing away some of the confusion surrounding the complexity of the "British" education system before many foreign readers or even unhistorical domestic ones can hope to make sense of the following chapters. Trying to explain to people who have not been exposed to the system, something of the goals, organisation, administration, financing, and government control or otherwise of "British" tertiary education is second only to explaining the rules of cricket to someone who believes it is a form of baseball! When the largely non-vocational aims of the "British" universities, often aping those of Oxford

and Cambridge, and the control which universities have had on the content of secondary education programmes are added to this soup, the stranger can be left totally bewildered. Since most of these idiosyncrasies have their roots in the 19th century, the authors of the Introduction had a golden opportunity, unfortunately overlooked, to clarify some of the complexities of "British" tertiary education.

Leaving aside these neglected difficulties, the author(s) (presumably Kadish and/or Tribe) in the Introductory chapter on the supply and demand for economics in late Victorian Britain, put forward a number of reasons for the slow pace at which economics carved out a separate niche for itself in universities. Economics was generally accepted throughout the 19th century as a legitimate if minor component of a liberal education. Chairs existed from early in the century, although they might be vacant or held as a secondary occupation. By mid-century, economics could generally be found on the university curriculum, not infrequently in conjunction with the Moral Sciences or History. Yet there was no great demand in the country at large for academically-trained economists.

Outside the universities, economics, generally elementary and uncontroversial, was an integral part of the political discourse. It was popular at times among students at extension lecture centres, including occasional courses on applied economics or economic history, but there was little demand for courses in advanced theory. Even when Local Authorities were given the means of financing further education for the lower-classes in the late 1880s, emphasis was given to improving skills in commercial practices rather than advanced courses in economics. The same was true of the university colleges, where vocational training was combined with liberal arts courses. In the old universities, the lack of demand for graduates with qualifications in economics was translated into a lack of demand from students for teaching in the subject. The Civil Service Examinations, which might have been expected to attract top economics graduates into key positions in the Treasury, failed to exert the modernising influence on university curricula that its founders had hoped for. By far the largest number of candidates were tested on their handwriting, grammar, spelling and arithmetic skills for the clerical and lower ranks of the Service, while no more than an average of ten men annually were given higher posts in the Service in the latter years of the century, and very few of these needed to demonstrate more than a passing acquaintance with economic theory. The feed-back from the Civil Service examination simply reinforced the existing emphasis on Classics in the school curriculum.

The author(s) conclude that the development of economics as a university subject was far more a question of supply-push than demand-pull. The elements of this push were the growth of the academic fashion for specialised three-year courses and the efforts of the greatest and most successful pusher of them all, Alfred Marshall.

John Maloney's chapter on the teaching of Political Economy in the University of London is written with his usual wit and elegance but contains some serious flaws of presentation. Brief but essential information on London University (initially planned as a university, then an examining board for affiliated colleges, becoming mid-century an examining board for students throughout the country and then undergoing a further unspecified change late in the century), appears only mid-way in the chapter and is incomplete. No explanation is offered as to why the discussion relates exclusively to two colleges, University and King's (perhaps the other colleges had no economics teaching at all - but it would be nice to know), and Maloney's discussion is oddly truncated by a reluctance to discuss the significance of the LSE, probably because the School is treated in a separate chapter.

These failings apart, Maloney's chapter on London University illustrates very clearly the marginal interest afforded by college authorities to the organisation of economics teaching - the professorship at University College for example, was left vacant for 20 years - as well as the absence of qualified candidates for teaching posts. Even when posts were filled at University and King's Colleges, the nature and amount of instruction offered was sometimes in the hands of individuals whose teaching was eccentric and sporadic. The subject was taken

more seriously during the professorships of Foxwell and Cunningham but neither was able to compete for students against the domination of the LSE. The vicious circle of low student demand, few examination requirements, and inadequate resources clearly dogged the establishment of economics as a major subject in these two colleges, but, as Maloney points out, a certain absence of "enthusiasm and conscientiousness" on the part of the professional staff contributed to the slow development of the subject.

Kadish's piece on economics at Oxford is more to the point, providing a clear picture of the slow progress of formal economic studies under the wing of the History School, at the same time as considerable research in economic and social history was carried out by young dons led by their consciences to understand and solve the problems thrown up by the industrial revolution. Again, it has been necessary to include a considerable amount of biographical detail to explain the vulnerability of the subject or its failure to capture the attention and imagination of the University. Price had a weak academic record; Rogers, in his second professorial period was extreme in his views and manners; Edgeworth lived in his own theoretical world and avoided involvement in University politics. The development of economic teaching and research was left in the hands of enthusiastic inter-collegiate lecturers, who were keen to specialise. Some of them left Oxford to take up higher posts elsewhere in the academic world. Even Marshall's brief stay at Balliol (four terms) made little impact on the University. Kadish unfortunately does not round off his discussion with description of the diploma in economics which was introduced in 1903. Otherwise his chapter illustrates perfectly the familiar vicious circle of professors lacking drive and political skills and the scarcity of keen undergraduates, which kept economics in a backwater, irrespective of the research enthusiasm and acknowledged authority of certain post-graduates and lecturers.

Recognising the possible significant interplay between economics taught at the universities and the extension movements, Kadish examines the rise and fall in demand for economics in the extension lecture schemes run by Cambridge, Oxford and London (Chapter 3). The purpose of these schemes was to bring the opportunities of education to men (and even women) who were unable to attend regular courses at a university either through lack of funds, leisure or accessibility. Cambridge, perhaps reflecting the early beginnings which the movement had (and which Kadish failed to note) in its Higher Local Examinations for women teachers and their senior pupils, hoped to appeal to men and women from many walks of life. Oxford's scheme was more directly aimed at working-class audiences and London, while aiming at all classes, subsidised working-class students and many of its lecture centres were in working-class districts. Cambridge hoped to provide a university-type course of study, twelve lectures and nine classes per term, starting with the elements of a subject and systematically expanding in scope and depth. Candidates were examined at the end of term and awarded certificates which were to be accepted by educational establishments. After an initial flurry of success, the extension lectures settled into a more simple structure of lectures on subjects which rose and fell in popularity. The choices of subjects were made by the local extension committees and on their current financial health, and were closely related to the popularity of the lecturer. Early lectures on economics followed a number of routes, either modified Mill or a historical approach, as favoured by Cunningham, but there was little call for systematic teaching in economics among the working-classes, irrespective of the approach taken. Oxford tried to address working-class audience more directly, giving shorter, cheaper courses under the auspices of local Co-operative societies. But the response was uneven and the demand for economic classes weak.

These results disappointed the men in both universities whose interest in the movement was prompted by a missionary zeal to unite the classes, relaying "common sense and moral wisdom". But practical problems - cost of courses and examinations, shift-work, fatigue prevented the poorest classes from following systematic courses of study. Lectures which were low in entertainment value and students in better economic situations were soon catered for by the University Colleges which sprang up in the major centres of population as developments of the extension lecture centres. Both Oxford and Cambridge extension found it difficult to keep good teachers more than a few years and very few of them were economics

specialists. London was more fortunate in this respect; teachers could live and work in the capital and travel easily to study centres.

There is an excellent chapter on the Queen's Colleges of Belfast, Cork and Galloway by T. A. Boylan and T. P. Foley which is a model of what all the papers in the book should have been - including those that were not written! The authors divide their paper into four sections, beginning with an all-important section giving the historical background to university education in Ireland, including Trinity College, Dublin, in the light of the strong religious sentiments/passions which prevailed. This is followed by the founding of the Queen's Colleges in 1845, a discussion on Political Economy teaching in the three Colleges, and a final section of biographical notes on the Professors of Jurisprudence and Political Economy during the relevant period. Political Economy teaching at the Colleges was associated with Law and initially subservient to Jurisprudence in the prescribed course structure. The appointment of Cliff Leslie to the Belfast Chair in 1853 gave Political Economy a higher profile. He argued repeatedly for greater recognition of the subject and was critical of the overall design of courses, wanting economics teaching geared more closely to "industrial instruction" and commerce. The authors point out that while this approach might be appropriate in Belfast, it was scarcely relevant elsewhere in Ireland where "economic activity was dominated by a largely underdeveloped agrarian economy". Reasons for the weak demand for economics in Cork and Galloway are discussed and neatly tied into the dominant issue of religion which, it comes as no surprise, complicated even the teaching of economics in Ireland. Only one small footnote was missing to guide the reader on this excursion into recent Irish history and that is the date on which the currently familiar and disputed division of the country into the Republic and Ulster was formalised and the connection between the three Colleges dissolved.

Kadish (Chapter 5), gives us a straight-forward account of Marshall's rôle in asserting the importance of economics as an academic subject in Cambridge. Marshall is seen as chief cuckoo in the Moral Sciences and History Tripos nests, fighting, exploiting or manipulating smaller birds until they gave up and left, History to a successful independent future, Moral Sciences less so. Some readers may feel that Marshall's single-mindedness is over-emphasised, but Mary Paley Marshall, who was well able to assess his life's achievements, believed that the establishment of the Economics Tripos was the greatest of them. Kadish discusses how the policy-oriented economics of 1880s and 1890s was manipulated by Marshall to enhance its scientific and academic status, whilst attracting students to the practical, general interest aspects of the subject, in particular, the ability of economics to provide solutions to the "evils" of industrial society. As he became increasingly assured of his own success in arguing the case for economics, the importance of "applied" economics declined, in favour of the study and development of abstract economic theory, although the practical aspects of economic study could be revived whenever they could be used to effect. Marshall also aimed to produce a "school" of academic economists where recruitment to teaching posts would be internalised and research directed by Marshall himself. "Such a school would ensure methodological unity and concentrations of effort, thereby elimination disruptive controversy on both method and aims" (p. 150).

Professor Collison Black's discussion of Jevon's contribution to economic teaching at Manchester and London begins with the significance of Jevon's non-conformist background in a family familiar with the workings of industry and commerce as well as an enjoyment of the arts and sciences. Although Professor Black gives the reader a good picture of Jevon's personal development as academic economist, he is less precise about courses and student numbers in Manchester, possibly because there were few of either sort (although further statistical information can be found in Tribe's chapter on the Northern universities). Jevons had little opportunity to produce economic specialists through his teaching and his influence was greatest through his writing. It has proved easier to trace attendance data for his courses in University College, London where a number of his overseas students went on to hold government office. Black concludes that Jevons, who died aged only 47 in 1882 before the almost total institutionalisation of economics took place, saw himself less as an institutionalised, academic teacher of economics and more a freelance writer on economic

subjects.

Keith Tribe sets himself the enormous task of discussing the growth of Political Economy courses in the Northern civic universities. He wisely concentrates on the Owens College and its transformation into the Manchester Faculty of Commerce as providing a "leading model" for such courses in the other provincial universities, as well as supplying them with many of their new professors. Like so many of the other civic universities, Manchester, in the shape of Owens College, developed from the many experiments in adult further education, sometimes aimed at the working classes, though usually taken over by the (lower) middle classes to a point where students were being prepared for University of London degrees. This being the case, courses were determined first by popular demand and then by the requirements of the London degree syllabi. When Owens College received its Charter as the founder institution of the Victoria University, which was to bring together several institutions in the North of England as a degree-awarding body, it became possible for Owens to determine its own syllabi. Courses in Political Economy became a compulsory part of both the Ordinary and Arts Honours Degrees. Much greater rigour was introduced into the teaching and examination of economics. Tribe concludes that this resulted from the inclusion of the subject in degree courses and the fact that with university status, Owens and the other civic colleges could attract better students. Students wanting more elementary or popular education were catered for elsewhere:

It was this differentiation of educational provision, and the emergence of more definite points of transition between levels in the system, that enabled colleges and universities to develop new courses and recruit specialist teachers for them. The presence of student demand for new or additional courses was not therefore a necessary condition for the structural transition to higher education to occur (p. 198).

Having reached this level of autonomy, it was possible for employers and students to demand courses in economics catering to their needs in the world of commerce. Tribe notes that while it is true that the Faculty of Commerce did develop an honours degree in economics à la Marshall, this was "on the back of practical commerce teaching". Ultimately, theoretical and commercial economics developed independent but complementary rôles at Manchester, unlike Birmingham under Ashley where the emphasis on commercial education prevailed.

Tribe discusses in some detail the establishment and growth (or otherwise) of economic courses in Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield and Birmingham and concludes that "it would be wrong to see the transition in the teaching of economics as one driven solely by the propagation of Marshallian economics" (p. 225). He supports his assertion with reference to required reading which usually took students no further than the *Economics of Industry*, and to the emphasis on commercial subjects in the curriculum. The view that the Cambridge Tripos was the model for economic teaching and cornerstone of the development of academic economics throughout the educational system fails to take account of "the complex dynamics of student demand, institutional constraints and availability of appropriate teaching" (p. 226), and, one might add, the independence of institutions in matters of teaching and syllabus. Tribe suggests on the basis of the evidence which he has assembled from the Northern universities that it was the demand for commercial courses which initially sheltered economics and then gave it the opportunity to develop as an independent academic discipline. Tribe's chapter contains a wealth of detail for anyone wanting to look more closely at the Northern university colleges and the Victoria University.

In a final chapter, Kadish discusses the foundation of the London School of Economics and its close links with London Chamber of Commerce and, through Sidney Webb, with the London County Council Technical Education Board. The importance of commercial education was emphasised from the outset, since London contained more clerks, both absolutely and relatively than any other city - bank clerks, insurance clerks, those working with accountants, actuaries and auditors, the large army of railway clerks and several thousand civil service and

local government clerks, all of whom required specialist training. Initially this was done in close consultation with the professional bodies of Bankers, Accountants, etc. At a more general level, the LSE offered to those engaged in the "practical business of life" instruction in the "concrete applications of economics to the affairs of commerce, finance and public administration" (p. 236). Research was encouraged from the outset among both teachers and students who were to consider London as an "enormous laboratory [...] surrounded on all sides by masses of facts" (p. 239). In taking this approach, the School felt it was counteracting the emphasis which other courses in economics, and especially economics as taught in Cambridge, placed on abstract theories and "unwarranted generalization". Public support would only be given if economics could show it was of practical use - a point which even Marshall was obliged to make in his *Plea* for the creation of an Economics Tripos in Cambridge in 1902 when he realised that the University was unwilling to bear the additional costs of a new Tripos. The important distinction was that Marshall paid only lip-service to the concept; those running the LSE in these early years meant it.

This book is readable and informative but uneven and far from comprehensive. It also assumes much background knowledge on the part of the reader. It becomes, however, quite clear that in the institutions discussed, the development of economics has largely been a question of individual personalities, private (local) financial support and religious affiliation rather than Government enquiries, Parliamentary decisions and Ministry of Education directives, a point which continues to mystify and confuse many overseas spectators of the British tertiary education scene.

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