

**VENTER J J. 2002. 76:289-320. ECONOMISM: THE DEBATE ABOUT THE
UNIVERSALITY CLAIMS OF ORTHODOX ECONOMICS**

Originally in: Tymieniecka, A T (ed) *Analecta Husserliana* 76: 289-320.

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Even before my studies in the Netherlands in the 1970's a basic critical attitude towards capitalism had been developing in my mind. I was still very young, and unschooled in economic theory and practice. The extreme criticisms that I found in the Netherlands from the side of the revolting students, had some good effects:

- *Firstly I began to realise that some aspects of capitalism did warrant serious*

criticism.

- *In that situation I also had to learn that there were varieties of Marxism and socialism, and that one could learn something from this.*

*Back in South Africa I discovered to my great shock that my own and other young colleagues' attempts at developing a Christian critique was considered 'Neo-Marxist' or even 'Communist'. Even in 2012 at a Calvinist meeting a retired minister of the Reformed Churches approached me to ask what I was doing there – he had heard that I was a 'liberalist and a communist' ... I amusedly told him that I was also called a *verkrampste*, a racist, a cultural racist, a jingo ... which means I had to be a Christian!*

It was during those days that I realised that I needed some formal training in economics. So I followed economics course up to the level of B A Honours, together with some basic theory of management.

During the later 1980's we were steamrolled with the idea of 'competitive excellence'. I had by then begun to restructure my courses in the history of philosophy into a foundational his-tory (reminiscent of, but not the same as present-day history of ideas or intellectual history). Thus I began to work on cultural issues and their philosophical foundations, among others the role of competitiveness in Western intellectual history. Studies in economics came to overlap with the history of military and political thought, but at the same time with the history of world pictures and worldviews. I discovered a network of ideas of competition, especially with regard to the faith in progress, the idea of a balance of powers in politics, the opposition between mechanistic and organismic world pictures and worldviews, and human dignity.

Quite helpful was reading economists neglected by philosophers. It is too easily forgotten that economics only became a separate discipline in the early nineteenth century. Before then it was usually taught as part of moral philosophy. However, already in the seventeenth century economic behaviour was approached from a Cartesian mathematical point of view, with mechanistic tendencies in the views on exchange. This presupposed a stereotypical behaviour in economic agents, thus dehumanising the economically active human into a machine that behaves according to mathematically predictable rules. The stenotype behaviours of economic agents in

Ricardo and Marx are typical examples of the dehumanising of human agency for the sake of calculative predictive science.

Thus analysed, capitalistic economic theory lost its philosophical innocence. But taking it up in the context of competitiveness (as a moral code and a guarantee of quality), opened up a world of insight into the history of Western culture. I have discussed the latter in the books on natural law available on this site.

Broadly my approach to teaching philosophy in the format of critical thinking about the philosophy-worldview-culture relationships has come into its own in the creative ways in which my younger colleagues are using it. I have made the mistake of calling it 'history of ideas', which became somewhat of an albatross around my neck, because the work is confused with contemporary – somewhat idealistic or intellectualistic – 'histories of ideas' or 'intellectual histories'. My version is nearer to a history of philosophy in culture and culture in philosophy. Thus economic practices, both in themselves and as theorised by economists, find themselves in my courses, and even so issues in the natural sciences, networked into cultural practices.