

## Teaching the History of Economic Thought at the University of Sydney: Some Reflections

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My retirement as Professor of Economics at the University of Sydney earlier this year (2002) is a nice vantage point from which to review my forty years of teaching the History of Economic Thought at that University. My first three lectures in that subject dealing with Turgot were given during April 1961 at the request of E.L. Wheelwright, that is, when I had commenced my postgraduate studies for a Masters thesis on the economics of Turgot and I was still a graduand. In 1962 and 1963 I took the first-term lectures in HET as a young 'Teaching Fellow'. However, because I have now commenced research for a history of the Faculty of Economics at the University of Sydney (1920-1999), a general overview of the manner in which the History of Economic Thought has been included within its syllabus from 1920 offers a broader foundation for reflection than the forty years of my own experience as teacher of that subject would permit.

I might indicate that I had been introduced to studying the History of Economic Thought during my fourth year as a Faculty of Economics student at Sydney, when that course was a compulsory subject for all students wishing to graduate as a Bachelor of Economics in the by-laws then governing the Sydney degree. These by-laws also required that a student undertaking honours courses in the Faculty needed to take the subject at the Pass with Credit level. My first lecturer in HET was Bruce McFarlane (who in first term lectured to us on the foundations from Mercantilism up to and including the economics of Adam Smith). In second term, E.L. (Ted) Wheelwright lectured on classical economics, Marx, and the views of various 'economic heretics' such as Hobson and Veblen. Third-term lectures were given by Professor S.J. Butlin on marginalism and on the historical school, classes which barely brought the course into the twentieth century (Louis Haddad recalls that in 1961 Butlin's lectures ended with Marshall's Cambridge successors and the cost controversies). The Pass with Credit component of the course which I had to take as an honours student consisted of a two-hour seminar per week at which papers were presented and the writing of a 10,000-word thesis on a self-chosen topic. I chose as my thesis topic, 'The Economics of Richard Cantillon' (whose *Essay on the Nature of Commerce in General* I had acquired in the Higgs edition at a subsidised price through the Royal Economic Society). The seminar topics for the three terms were respectively the development of classical rent theory and its generalisation into the marginal productivity theory of distribution (Bruce McFarlane); a critical examination of R.L. Meek's 1956 *Studies in the Labour Theory of Value* (Ted Wheelwright); and, likewise, of Ricardo's *Notes on Malthus* (volume II of the Sraffa edition of Ricardo, which could then still be purchased by members of the Royal Economic Society for the princely sum of £1 or at £10 for the full set of ten volumes, which I then also purchased) for term three (Syd Butlin). I was first in the course at the annual examination (1960), a performance repeated in Economics IV, so that I just managed to graduate B.Ec. with first-class honours. This gained me a postgraduate scholarship for taking a Masters degree by thesis only on the economics of Turgot, awarded in 1963 (after some hassles with the

external examiners, G.L.S. Tucker and John La Nauze). Then, in August of that year, I departed by ship for London to commence studies for the Ph.D. at the London School of Economics (on a British Commonwealth Scholarship) where I wrote a thesis on 'The History of the Theories of Value, Production and Distribution from 1650 to 1776'. This was completed in the minimum time of two years under the supervision of Bernard Corry, and awarded in 1965 after a very rigorous (and long) oral examination conducted by Ron Meek (who had come up from Leicester for that purpose, and who only stopped when it was time for the *matinée* performance of a Shakespeare play to start at the nearby Aldwych theatre). I returned to Australia in 1965 after being appointed to a lectureship in Economics at the University of Sydney and started teaching on arrival in third term. That teaching comprised a seminar to all Faculty honours students on Marshall's *Principles of Economics* (I had taught this together with Bernard Corry at LSE in 1964-65 as a seminar course) – replacing Butlin's traditional third-term seminar course on Ricardo's 'Notes on Malthus' – as well as a seminar on capital theory (Ricardo, Böhm-Bawerk, Wicksell, Hayek) for Economics IV honours students. In 1966, I was assigned the first-term lecture course on HET (on Mercantilism, Physiocracy and eighteenth-century economics more generally up to and including Adam Smith) – the segment of the course I had previously taught as a Teaching Fellow in 1962 and 1963 – and gave a HET seminar to the honours students on the development of the theory of rent. My teaching career in HET was by then well and truly launched.

The remainder of these reflections on teaching HET at the University of Sydney is divided into three parts. The first surveys the teaching of the History of Economic Thought and its place in the Faculty of Economics syllabus from 1920 to 1965. The second part continues the history of HET teaching from 1966 to 2001, the period when I was continuously involved in that teaching except for a few breaks to take sabbaticals, as periods of overseas study leave were then described. A third and final section derives some conclusions from these rather self-indulgent reflections.

## I

Some teaching of the History of Economic Thought seems to have preceded the creation of a Faculty of Economics at the University of Sydney which commenced operations in the 1920 academic year. Among the courses on offer from the Department of Economics and Commerce, the 1919 *Calendar* listed Economics I, Economics II, Economics III, Accountancy, Business Principles, Statistics and Economic History, all courses given in the evening. However, a further reference to Economic History indicates that this was combined with systematic study of the History of Economic Thought (1919 *Calendar*, pp. 190-91, cf. 1918 *Calendar*, p. 186). Some years previously, in 1914, one of the five parts into which the course Economics III was divided was devoted to the History of Economic Thought, with the recommendation that Ingram's *History of Political Economy* was a suitable text to facilitate its study (1914 *Calendar*, p. 173). Few details of the course were given. However, it was indicated that distinction students needed to have an adequate knowledge of the economic writings of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, J.S. Mill, W.S. Jevons and Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk and, in addition, sufficient expertise in French and German to enable them to translate work by German and French economic writers. This part of the Economics syllabus was undoubtedly taught by

R.F. Irvine, the only full-time economics teacher employed by the University during the opening decades of the twentieth century, when economics and commerce studies were gradually introduced to the syllabus of the university.

A German and French language requirement was likewise inserted among the skills expected of students in the final, fourth, year of the economics degree which was offered by the new Faculty of Economics in 1920. This degree structure also maintained the strong emphasis on the commercial subjects which had been offered by the former Department of Economics and Commerce. Its syllabus in fact became the nucleus for the degree structure of the new Faculty. First-year studies for the new B.Ec. degree comprised Economics I and two Arts subjects; second-year studies consisted of Economics II, the half courses Business Principles and Economic Geography, and, as the third subject, half courses in Accountancy and Statistics (for Accountancy students, incidentally, History of Economic Thought in year four was not compulsory, provided that in their second year they took an additional half course of Accountancy I) or Insurance Mathematics I (for those intending to pursue actuarial studies). Year three of the degree required Economics III (or Insurance Mathematics II), as well as two other courses, namely, Economic History and Commercial and Industrial Law. By the end of their third year, students were expected to have an adequate knowledge of the writings of Adam Smith, Ricardo, J.S. Mill, W.S. Jevons and Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, so that the same History of Economic Thought material continued to be included with the Economics III syllabus of the new degree. Fourth year consisted of a range of constrained choices to make up a further three subjects. These were, firstly, either Public Administration or two from the following half courses: Principles of Banking, Transport Economics, Political Science, Municipal Administration, Philosophy I (Psychology) or Philosophy II (Sociology); secondly, either Accountancy II or an Arts subject not previously taken; and, thirdly, History of Economic Thought. Fourth-year students, as already indicated, would be tested on their proficiency in understanding French and German (1920 *Calendar*, pp. 86-7).

The History of Economic Thought course introduced to the 1920 degree structure was not described in more detail until the 1923 *Calendar*, the first year when it was actually taught in the new degree. This defined it as 'the history of economic doctrines, as shown in the works of the chief economic writers, especially of the nineteenth century. Students will be expected to have an adequate knowledge of these writings', which were, however, not specified. The suggested text was Gide and Rist, *History of Economic Doctrines*, with Cannan, *History of the Theories of Production and Distribution from 1776 to 1848*, Haney, *History of Economic Thought* and Ingram, *History of Political Economy*, as recommended supplementary readings (1923 *Calendar*, p. 220). By the time this course was given, Irvine had been dismissed from the University and R.C. Mills appears to have taken on its teaching by seminars rather than by lectures. At least, this was what Hermann Black (1970, p. 14) recalled as the practice when he had attended HET classes in 1927: 'And when Professor Mills ran a Seminar in the History of Economic Thought (there were no lectures in this subject) we [that is, Madgwick and Black] never let him get a word in edgeways either...'. The degree structure of which HET was a semi-compulsory part continued in force until 1925, when a new four-year degree structure was introduced, incorporating four continuous years of formal economics studies and other changes from the previous practice associated with R.F. Irvine's Deanship and the former Department of Economics and Commerce.

The 1925 degree requirements maintained a highly structured combination of courses with rather limited choice. Its prescribed first year now consisted of Economics I, Philosophy I and two half courses, Business Principles and Economic Geography. Its second year comprised Economics II, an Arts course not yet taken and two further half courses, Modern Political Institutions and Commercial and Industrial Law. The two senior years were subdivided into an A and a B stream, of which the second enabled concentration on Accounting subjects. For both streams, Economics III and IV were compulsory, as was a half course in Statistics in third year, and a course in Economic History in fourth year. For Group A students, the remaining one and a half courses in third year were Public Administration and the half course, Accountancy IA, in fourth year; its remaining course was an Arts course not yet taken. Group B students in third year took the half course Commercial and Industrial Law II and Accountancy I (A and B); for fourth year their remaining subject was Accountancy II.

From this description of the 1925 degree structure, it appears at first sight that History of Economic Thought had disappeared from the syllabus. However, this is not really the case. The newly introduced Economics IV was largely, if not totally, composed of the material taught in the former History of Economic Thought course (1925 *Calendar*, p. 226). It was described as dealing ‘with the development of modern economic doctrines. Special attention will be paid to the chief writers of the nineteenth century. Students will be expected to have an adequate knowledge of these works and to be able to criticise them from the modern standpoint.’ As with the former History of Economic Thought course, the set text was Gide and Rist, *History of Economic Doctrines*; recommended supplementary reading was Cannan’s *History of the Theories of Production and Distribution from 1776 to 1848*, Ingram’s *History of Political Economy* and Haney’s *History of Economic Thought*. This course description for Economics IV remained in force for the next 13 years, that is, until 1938, except that Cannan’s *Review of Economic Theories* was added to the recommended reading from 1930. (My second-hand copy of this book purchased many years ago had previously belonged to Kevin Ellis, a former Speaker in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, who graduated B.Ec. in 1939.) Again, from the staffing of the Economics Department at this time, and from Hermann Black’s recollections previously quoted, this Economics IV course appears to have been taught by the then Professor of Economics, R.C. Mills.

In 1938, History of Economic Thought returned to the degree syllabus as a subject in its own right. It was now defined as a course dealing with ‘the development of major economic doctrines since the age of Mercantilism [in which] special attention is paid to the historical background of economic theories, and their influence upon subsequent practical policy’. The course required that students ‘study a general history of economic thought and, in addition, the writings of a selected classical economist’. A list of textbooks would be made available later in 1938.

For 1939 and 1940, the classical text selected for specialisation was Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, and this choice appears to have remained in force until the next major changes to the Faculty’s degree structure were announced in 1945-46. Teaching of History of Economic Thought over this period was perhaps done initially by S.J. Butlin, who had joined the staff as a lecturer in the later 1930s, and subsequently by John La Nauze, who had joined the Economics teaching staff in 1940 (see Arndt 1985, p. 11). From the late 1940s La Nauze was assisted in this

task by Kurt Singer who 'was responsible for the period up to Adam Smith. When La Nauze took over after the first term, he discovered that Singer had got only as far as Aristotle' (Arndt 2001, p. 74). From 1946 to 1949 La Nauze was Reader in the History of Economic Thought, the only time such a position has existed at the University of Sydney.

The changes then introduced were known as the 'old by-laws' and governed the degree when I was a student in the Faculty from 1957-60. (The new by-laws course structure is summarised at the start of Section II below.) The first year of the Bachelor of Economics degree contained three compulsory courses: Economics I, Descriptive Economics and Scientific Method. The following three years comprised, respectively, Economics II, III and IV, together with a sequence of a second 'major' subject to be chosen from Economic History, Government and Public Administration, Economic Statistics and Accounting, with, as the third course for the second and third years, a Faculty of Economics or Faculty of Arts course not yet taken, and for the fourth year, compulsory History of Economic Thought.

The 'born-again' compulsory fourth-year course, History of Economic Thought, was given a detailed course description in 1948 which can be quoted in full:

The four courses in Economics are concerned with analysis and description of the modern economic world. The books used, and the views discussed, are for the most part, those of contemporary writers. History of Economic Thought attempts to give some perspective to these courses. Assuming a knowledge of theoretical economics appropriate to fourth-year students, it traces the emergence of systematic economics; the interaction of economic conditions and economic thought; and some of the main problems which concerned economists in the past. The period covered is roughly from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with some glances at preceding and subsequent developments.

The subject is vast, and some selection has to be made. Some treatment of the main periods and the outstanding writers is always a necessity; but within this general framework the topics discussed may vary considerably from time to time. Lectures in the main deal chronologically with the various writers, although sometimes the history of a single subject is followed. While reference is frequently made to the general historical background, it is not possible to discuss in detail the political, social, economic and literary history without which the history of a branch of thought is difficult to appreciate. The 'preliminary reading' lists, which are posted on the Faculty Notice Boards before the long vacation, suggest books which help to repair deficiencies in knowledge of this general background. Instead of two short essays, one long essay is set; and class exercises may be required. One or more texts of importance in the history of economics, or selected portions of these, are set for special study. No text-book on the history of economic thought is set, but a number of books in this field are recommended as useful. (1948 *Calendar*, p. 429)

Honours students from 1948 were required to undertake special study of selected writers and topics, with the proviso that such students would be able to exercise some choice in the topics to be studied 'according to their special interests'.

Given the warning about the inadequacy of any single text for this subject, the brief discussion of books which followed suggested that Roll's *A History of Economic Thought* was probably 'one of the best available', while texts likely to be selected for special study were Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*; Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy*; J.S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*; Marx, *Capital*; Marshall, *Principles of Economics*. Teaching for this course was shared initially by John La Nauze, Kurt Singer, Cyril Renwick and Syd Butlin and, later, during the 1950s, by J.R. Wilson, E.L. Wheelwright and S.J. Butlin when the first two had joined the Economics teaching staff. By 1953 La Nauze, Singer and Renwick had all left the Faculty.

For 1949, the last year of La Nauze's HET teaching at Sydney, the classics to be studied included Mun's *England's Treasure by Forraign Trade*, Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and J.S. Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* while the recommended texts were Roll's *A History of Economic Thought*, Cannan's *Review of Economic Theory*, Alexander Gray's *Development of Economic Doctrines*, Dobb's *Political Economy and Capitalism* and Heimann's *History of Economic Doctrines*. The Pass with Credit requirement in HET for all honours students in the Faculty (in vogue until the passing of the 'old by-laws' in 1961) was spelt out more fully in the 1952 *Calendar*. This listed Stigler's *Theories of Production and Distribution* and Hla Myint's *Theories of Welfare Economics* as books to be studied, 'together with certain specified journal articles'. The list of suggested HET textbooks was amended to include Gray's *Development of Economic Doctrines* as 'useful preliminary reading', and recommended Roll and Heimann as more advanced texts. It also dropped Cannan's *Review of Economic Theory* and Dobb's *Political Economy and Capitalism* from the list and added, somewhat surprisingly given its contents, La Nauze's *Political Economy in Australia*. The last addition, probably made by La Nauze himself before his departure from Sydney in 1949, suggests that the HET syllabus at one stage was intended to include an Australian economics segment, perhaps dealing with Jevons in Australia, Hearn's *Plutology* and the Australian protection debate, the subject matter of La Nauze's slim book.

The 1954 *Calendar* (pp. 919-20) provided a new description of the subject matter of HET. It succinctly stated the aims of the course as justification of its compulsory place in the Faculty syllabus.

The History of Economic Thought has a logical and necessary place in the courses on economics, since it supplements the theory courses, by providing historical background and perspective, and it is complementary with the whole body of doctrine as it stands at the moment, and is expounded in current political economy.

It follows from this that the functions of the course are clear. They are:

- (a) To demonstrate the evolutionary and temporal nature of current economic theory;
- (b) To indicate the attitudes which have developed in the field of policy, and how these are related to past theory, environment, and action; and

- (c) To make the student aware of the literary, philosophical and cultural elements in the corpus of economics.

The lectures aim to provide a working knowledge of names, dates, and theories; the reading provides a direct contact with the past – hence the stress on original works. The histories and commentaries are used as guides only, and in general do not influence much the presentation of material in the lectures. Any history of economic thought, whether written or spoken, is necessarily selective, and reflects the author's own special interests and predilections.

The calendar then indicated that during the year reproductions of original material were to be distributed to students who otherwise would not be able to gain access to such material. Examples are extracts from Jane Marcet's *Conversations on Political Economy*, John Gray's *Lectures on Human Happiness*, and the complete texts of Lloyd's 1834 'Lecture on the Notion of Value', McCulloch's review of Ricardo's *Principles* and his 'Machinery and Accumulation' from the pages of the *Edinburgh Review*. Some years previously, the Faculty had commenced a series of reprints in Economics and Economic History of which three issues appeared (*Report on the High Price of Bullion with Minutes of Evidence* (1810), edited by S.J. Butlin; Malthus's review of this report from the 1811 *Edinburgh Review*; and *Five Papers on Political Economy* by Malthus, both edited by Cyril Renwick). These were among the recommended texts for HET students together with Heimann's *History of Economic Doctrines*, Ricardo's *Principles*, J.S. Mill's *Autobiography*, Marshall's *Principles of Economics*, Keynes's *Essays in Biography*, Harrod's *Life of Keynes*, Schumpeter's *Ten Great Economists*, Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Kapp and Kapp, *Readings in Economics*, Hutchison's *Review of Economic Doctrines* (Part I) and Menger's *Principles of Economics*. Recommended additional books listed were MacGregor's *Economic Thought and Policy*, Roll's *History of Economic Thought*, Gide and Rist's *History of Economic Doctrines*, Sraffa's edition of *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo* (vols VI-IX) and Marx's *Capital* (in the two-volume Everyman edition). This was a solid mix of originals and commentaries, in line with the remarks on the philosophy of the course presented in the course outline. Much of this structure was in place when I took the pass course in 1960, though, as indicated in the introduction to this paper, the Pass with Credit course by then drew on different books.

## II

When I returned from London in 1965 to take up a lectureship in Economics at the University of Sydney, new by-laws were in operation. These had abolished the four-year degree with its restricted choices, substituting a three-year degree of ten subjects (four in first year, three in the subsequent two years) for pass students, with an additional fourth year for all honours students. For the purpose of this paper, History of Economic Thought was no longer a compulsory subject for pass students proceeding to a B.Ec. degree. However, this was not the case for students in their final honours year in the five honours schools (later six) offered by the Faculty (that is, Economics, Economic History, Economic Statistics, Government and Public Administration, Accounting and, from 1969, Industrial Relations). Honours students were required to take the History of Economic Thought Pass with Credit course, with its weekly seminar additional to lectures, and the writing of a

10,000-word essay on a topic of their choice (to be approved by the lecturer in charge of the course). If, however, they failed to choose an appropriate topic by the due date, they had to write an essay on the economics of J.R. McCulloch (a fate which, during my time at Sydney, was systematically avoided by virtually every honours student). The effect of this on the number of pass students enrolled in History of Economic Thought is clearly visible in Table 1 – the predominance of honours students in the enrolment scared off ordinary pass students from taking the subject, as the data for student numbers for 1964-1971 fully demonstrate.

This compulsory aspect to History of Economics teaching remained in force until 1970 (it was abolished at the start of the 1971 academic year as a result of strong pressure from honours students in schools other than economics and, more effectively, by their teachers). At the beginning of the 1970s, therefore, History of Economic Thought became an optional third-year course in the Faculty, while students in the final honours year in Economics (as well as M.Ec. by coursework students) could take a History of Economic Thought course as one option from among the various other courses they had to attempt for their honours (or postgraduate) degree. From 1973 this fourth-year course became the 'Economics Classics' course, which has since then remained as an enduring part of the syllabus for honours Economics students in the Faculty. (I might indicate that such a History of Economic Thought honours course was not offered in 1972 because I was on study leave; while in 1971 I went through Böhm-Bawerk's *Critical History of Interest Theories* with the Economics final honours year students who chose to take History of Economic Thought.)

Given the double offering in History of Economic Thought from the early 1970s, the remainder of this part of the paper is divided into two sub-sections. The first reflects on aspects of the optional pass course as taught from the mid-1960s (when I returned from London) as a survey course. The second looks at the History of Economic Thought honours (postgraduate) course, called Economic Classics from 1973 onwards, and briefly mentions my supervision of theses on History of Economic Thought topics.

### **(i) The History of Economic Thought Pass Course**

From 1962 to 1971 inclusive, History of Economic Thought was offered as a full-year, optional course which could be taken by third-year students as one of the ten subjects required for the degree. From 1973, History of Economic Thought became a full-year optional component of the subject Economics III, one of many such components from which students had to choose in order to complete this subject for their degree. From 1989, when two semesters replaced the traditional three-term organisational structure of the academic year, History of Economic Thought was converted into two one-semester courses which formed a sequel over the academic year ('Classical Economics' in first semester, 'Modern Developments' in second semester). Finally, from 1998, History of Economic Thought became a full, one-semester course, available as a self-standing third-year option to students taking the various degrees then offered by the Faculty (B.Ec., B.Ec.Soc.Sci., and B.Com.) as well as to students from the Faculties of Arts, Agriculture and Science, provided they had completed Economics II or Economics II (Soc.Sci.). All these courses shared the characteristic of being survey courses which chronologically examined major developments in economics from the seventeenth century to the Second World War.

Teachers of this course did of course change over the years. I myself participated in this teaching continuously from 1965 by taking at least one-third of the course (and often more) until, in 2001, my last year as university teacher, I taught the whole course, from the fundamentals of Mercantilism up to and including Harrod-Domar growth models and the theoretical problems which they generated. (This is in fact the scope of the textbook I have written with Gianni Vaggi. Its subtitle is *From Mercantilism to Monetarism*, and it ends with a chapter on Friedman.) I might add that over the previous decades of my History of Economic Thought lecturing I had taught every part of the course, so that I had accumulated a satisfactory set of lecture notes covering the whole of the syllabus.

During the 1960s and much of the 1970s, I taught the first-term material in the history of economics from Mercantilism up to and including the economics of Adam Smith, the later terms (at least up to 1971-72) being taken by S.J. Butlin (up to 1968), Louis Haddad and Ted Wheelwright. During the remainder of the 1970s, Flora Gill replaced Ted Wheelwright, and from then on until 1997 it continued to be taught by Flora Gill, Louis Haddad and myself, the subject matter divided according to our preferences and convenience. This included 1989-97, when History of Economic Thought was split into two, sequential one-semester courses called respectively Classical Economics and Modern Developments. Between 1998 and 2000 I taught the subject with Graham White (who lectured on Ricardo, on Marx and, during the final weeks of semester, on more modern developments such as imperfect competition, the Keynesian revolution and post-Keynesian developments).

Student numbers enrolled in History of Economic Thought varied from as few as 21 to nearly sixty students over this period, the numbers being a little lower if only students completing the course are counted. Table 1 in the Appendix provides almost continuous data on student numbers from 1974 to 2001, together with data drawn from University *Calendars* for selected years from the commencement of the Faculty in 1920.

A few comments on my changing lecturing style while teaching the first-term course are perhaps appropriate. Initially, I gave the lectures in the form of a continuing story (like an old-fashioned radio serial) where the story for the day ended when the official 50 minutes of the lecture period had expired, to be resumed at that point at the start of the next lecture. This gave a degree of continuity to the historical account of 'Mercantilism and its critics', the title of my first-term HET lecture course. I add that these lectures relied heavily on my study of Heckscher's magisterial two-volume work, *Mercantilism*, and on the two opening chapters of the equally authoritative treatment by Viner in his *Studies in the Theory of International Trade*. Later, when I tended to divide the course neatly by various topics that were allotted a discrete number of lectures (generally one, but sometimes more, depending on the author and/or topic covered), I also left room for treating broader, historiographical issues. These included an introduction on what I called the 'why, what and how' to study HET, and detailed examination of major classificatory terms in the subject such as 'classical economics' (discussed from the perspective of the conventional commentator literature, that of Keynes and that of Marx, the last of which I preferred because it was the most appropriate of the three), the 'marginal revolution', the Keynesian revolution, with special reference to the rationale for using such nomenclature. Much of this conceptual discourse rested on the foundation provided by underlying treatments of economic surplus, or

on what became known as the 'surplus approach in economics'. The lectures, in short, stressed the historical dimension of the subject and not just the economics.

What other reflections can be drawn from this experience of teaching history of economic thought for more than three decades? Several are perhaps worth sharing. First, in teaching History of Economic Thought at Sydney from 1966, there was even less reliance on textbooks than during the earlier period (as outlined in the previous section). From the early 1970s, for example, although it had been available since 1967, we recommended William Barber's Pelican book on the history of economic thought as good preliminary reading and mentioned a selection of larger texts as part of the recommended reading for the course. For some years in the 1970s, we also recommended Claudio Napoleoni's insightful *Economic Thought of the Twentieth Century*. During the 1980s, Phyllis Deane's *The Evolution of Economic Ideas* replaced Barber's little book. From 1998, we used Screpanti's and Zamagni's *An Outline of the History of Economic Thought* as a text and, when that was no longer available in 2001, I suggested the latest edition of Rima's history of economics as a somewhat inferior substitute. Instead of reliance on texts, we supplied a detailed guide for reading, though not as detailed as some of the bibliographies which I was asked to prepare for students during the 1960s.

Secondly, the style of setting essay topics has undergone an interesting modification. I started with the traditional offering of topics on specific subjects (comparing Locke and Hume on interest theory; value, price and distribution theory in the *Wealth of Nations*; the concept of value in Physiocracy, to mention some 1963 examples). Later, we introduced a book review of a classic as a suitable essay topic, the choice of classic being left to students but subject to approval by the lecturer in charge. This had a number of advantages. It meant that students had to read at least one classic during their course since a succinct summary of the contents of the selected classic was an essential (but insufficient) attribute of a satisfactory essay. Secondly, this essay requirement effectively provided an additional market for the classics in economics which, since 1982, I had been publishing (originally for the Japanese market where their distribution was organised by Professor Toshihiro Tanaka, whom I had first met at the Armidale conference of HETSA in 1981; from 1989, they became publications of the Centre for the Study of the History of Economic Thought which the University enabled me to establish). This second series of University of Sydney reprints of economic classics finished in 2000 (details of what effectively was the first series were provided in the previous section), while the Centre formally ceased operations in 2001. (I add for those interested that copies of most of the second series, and of one reprint from the first series, are still available at modest prices). The use of book review as essay, from my experience, is a practice I can strongly recommend to fellow teachers of the History of Economic Thought.

Thirdly, we examined rigorously by means of an unseen three-hour examination paper, in which the paper was divided into sections appropriate to the subdivisions of the syllabus. In setting the paper, my personal objective as examiner was always to create questions which could be attempted at a reasonable standard by students who had prepared themselves for the examination at a level commensurate with the requirements of a third-year option in the final year of study for the degree. I failed myself as an examiner if any question I had set was not attempted by any student, since then such a question was either too difficult or its subject matter had not been effectively covered in the lectures. I cannot recall

having to fail myself on this basis during my years as teacher, though occasionally I came close, and was only saved by a single attempt at some questions.

Last, and most importantly, the lecture material was increasingly made more comprehensive by its concentration on key authors representing major trends in the developments of the subject over time. These stressed key aspects of their work and, *in toto*, provided a systematic overview of the development of economics over the centuries. Major books in that development, moreover, had a summary of their contents included as part of the lecture(s) devoted to them (this was essentially an adaptation of the device of reader's guides to major classical texts employed to good effect in Mark Blaug's *Economic Theory in Retrospect*, particularly the early editions). A brief outline of the life and times of the economist in question was also invariably included as a succinct way of placing the economics in a historical context.

One further reflection is in order. The thing I enjoyed most in teaching history of economic thought over the decades was the very good students it often attracted. This is not to say there were no bad students. But the good ones were very good. This quality was maintained up to my last HET class in 2001, where the student who topped the class (with a very high High Distinction mark) not only did a brilliant book review of Schumpeter's *Theory of Economic Development* but then, in the examination, wrote High Distinction answers to every question. That sort of response to your teaching is perhaps the best part of the academic experience and the one that lingers on. Such an experience of quality was also the case with many of the classes in 'Economic Classics' which I was privileged to teach, and with many of the students I supervised for higher degrees. This brings me to the second subsection of this part of my paper.

## **(ii) The History of Economic Thought Honours Course**

In the general introductory section at the start of the paper, I recounted my own experience with History of Economic Thought at the University of Sydney as an honours student; at the start of this section of the paper I mentioned the compulsory History of Economic Thought requirements for all honours students which were in force when I returned in 1965 and which were abolished from 1971. (One frequently-used rationale for this compulsion was that it provided a common yardstick by which to compare the quality of honours students in different schools, the class of honours for all Faculty honours students being traditionally decided by all their examiners at a special Faculty examiners' meeting.) I might reflect here that my experience with compulsory History of Economic Thought as a teacher made me strongly averse to such arrangements, particularly when dealing with students of the high intellect characteristic of honours students at that time. Those from schools other than Economics, generally speaking, did not like the seminar they had to attend, nor did they like the compulsory long (10,000-word) essay (or short thesis) as it was called. There is nothing more wearying than conducting a seminar with unwilling students, was my major finding from that experience, particularly since it made good class discussion in seminars almost impossible. However, despite the compulsion embedded in the teaching at this time, I did have the enjoyment of reading some very good extended honours essays on a very diverse range of economists (from which I frequently learned as much as the students who had written them). Nevertheless, free choice in my experience tends to draw superior work from what are generally high-quality students.

I indicated that, during the period when History of Economic Thought was still compulsory for all honours students in the Faculty, I had initially given a seminar on Marshall's *Principles of Economics* in 1965, the year I returned to Sydney University, repeating that topic for seminars in 1966. It was largely based on the course on Marshall taught by Bernard Corry in 1964-65 at the London School of Economics, in the teaching of which I had assisted. I subsequently gave seminars on the development of the theory of rent (largely derived from the seminar which I had taken in 1960 as a student with Bruce McFarlane). It covered Smith, West, Ricardo, J.S. Mill and Jevons, and finished with the conversion of the classical law of rent into a general marginal productivity theory of distribution by J.B. Clark, J.A. Hobson and P.H. Wicksteed. During 1967 and 1968 I developed a seminar course on Ricardo's *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* which covered value and price, wages, rent, profits, Say's Law and gluts, machinery, international trade and taxation. In 1969 and 1970, I held a seminar on developments in the theory of business cycles which included discussion of work by Marx, Jevons, Marshall and Bagehot, Hobson, Veblen, D.H. Robertson, Mitchell and Pigou and, in 1971, as already mentioned, a seminar on Böhm-Bawerk's *Critical History of Capital and Interest Theories* which dealt with his criticisms of earlier writers from Turgot to Menger. All these proved very interesting, and were instructive to me as teacher and researcher of the history of economic thought, as well as, hopefully, useful to my students.

As part of the honours teaching changes of the early 1970s, Economics final honours-year students from 1972 were given the option to complete their final honours year in the following manner: either by attempting four courses from a list of optional courses; or taking three such courses and writing an extended essay; or taking two such courses and writing a thesis. In 1973, the course I brought to this list was a three-term seminar/lecture course called 'Economic Classics' which I taught subsequently under that name until my retirement in 2002, though the syllabus underwent many changes and I taught it together with various colleagues from 1976 onwards. The initial 1973 Economic Classics syllabus devoted seminars to Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Ricardo's *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* and Marshall's *Principles of Economics*, each term's work being devoted to one of these classics. In 1975, at the request of students, I substituted Marx's *Capital* for Marshall's *Principles* in third term, with the explicit warning that students would be expected to have studied all three volumes of *Capital* because so many essential parts of Marx's system are included in the two later volumes even if Marx had not himself prepared them for publication. This experiment was not repeated but, as it turned out, Marshall's book did not return to the syllabus for some time. From 1976 to 1982 inclusive, Wicksell's economics was the subject for study in term three, initially taught by Colin Simkin (until 1980) and then for two years by Joseph Halevi (who by 1982 had introduced so much extraneous material that he destroyed the specific emphasis of the course on studying a classical text). From 1983, I therefore reverted to teaching the whole of the course in the way in which it was originally introduced, that is, studying the major treatises of Smith, Ricardo and Marshall as a specific way of viewing a particular line of development in the history of economics. I continued this until 1989, when the abandonment of the term structure for organising the academic year made it no longer feasible.

The establishment of a two-semester structure from 1989 induced a drastic change in the syllabus. Semester one now expanded the material on Marshall, largely by the inclusion of more lectures. These placed his *Principles* in the context

of its anticipators, and concluded with some treatment of the development of Marshall's economics by the Cambridge school of the 1920s and 1930s. Semester two then moved to the high-point of that Cambridge school, a detailed discussion of Keynes's *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*. I originally taught the whole of this course, but the Keynes semester was later taught by Graham White and by Tony Aspromourgos, who is in fact continuing to teach it (though the sequential structure underlying the original notion of the Economic Classics course has regrettably disappeared in some recent years).

What reflections can I make on this method of teaching the history of economics to honours students in economics? First, I need to point out that the concept of studying selected classics in depth by way of seminars to good students is an excellent way of teaching the subject to advanced students. In my experience, most students gain much from such study, often in unforeseen ways. For recent students, the Marshall-Keynes combination proved to be particularly popular (though more with respect to Keynes than to Marshall, because of the perception of Keynes's greater relevance to current economics). Personally, I always preferred the older structure of the course, only possible under a three-term structure, which dealt sequentially with Smith, Ricardo and Marshall, a further reason for my regret that this superior way for dividing the academic year was forced to give way to semesters.

Secondly, courses like this can only be satisfactorily conducted with good, interested students, who have obtained their own personal copy of the classics to be studied and who all actively participate in the discussion expected in a seminar format. To encourage this, I appointed discussion openers at random (and with little advance warning) to stimulate a degree of preparedness for all members of the class. Moreover, the preparation of questions by the presenter of the paper for discussion by individual members of the class towards the end of the seminar was a useful device that worked well (the questions themselves providing a marvellous assessment device as a further indication of how well that presenter had grasped the ins and outs of the topic). Thirdly, my assessment procedure consisted of a fifty per cent coursework component comprising separate assessment of the seminar paper, the presentation of the paper, the discussion opening and participation in general discussion during the term or semester, to provide an express warning at the start of the course on the penalties imposed on 'free riders'. Furthermore, if I discovered at the start of the seminar that the level of class preparation was inadequate, I cancelled the seminar and rescheduled it. This, I might add, needed only to be done once to act as deterrent to slackness in the class.

Some further aspects of the way in which I conducted seminars can be mentioned. Papers had to be submitted in advance (at least two days) and were taken as read at the start of the class. The presenter of the paper had ten minutes to outline its essentials; this was followed by preliminary discussion from the previously appointed discussion openers, who likewise had no more than ten minutes each. About one and a half hours was therefore left for general class discussion. I also insisted that the paper giver (and discussion opener) addressed the seminar topic as defined by topic and by the reading from the classic as actually set, and not the suggested commentators' views on the topic. The last rule, as with some of the others, was not always easy to enforce, because judging such differences in emphasis is largely a matter of degree. However, in 2001 I enforced this rule by reconvening a seminar on Marshall on demand which had degenerated into a lengthy debate on Friedman on Marshall on demand. This left essential

elements of Marshall's demand analysis uncovered, aspects required for subsequent seminars on his theory of distribution and on his welfare economics.

A three-hour examination (later one and a half hours, when the classics course was fully 'semesterised') made up the other fifty per cent of assessment. When my part of the course was confined to Marshall's *Principles*, I allowed students to take their copy of the book into the examination room. This raised the quality of illustrations in the answers, but did not in any way advantage poor students. After all, poor students usually were unable to find their way quickly to the appropriate section of the book, and therefore lost valuable writing time by leafing fruitlessly through its more than 800 pages in search of a profitable clue for a good answer to the question set. (Here, too, I failed myself as examiner if particular questions on the paper were not attempted by any student.)

Economic Classics was also open to good M.Ec. students proceeding to the degree by coursework and thesis. Sometimes, in fact, these students were external. A memento of one of those students – a framed print of Balliol College, Oxford – adorned my professorial study at the University until February 2002; it now hangs at home in a prominent spot. More importantly, such students frequently added greatly to the quality of the class as a whole, while there is perhaps no need to add that uninterested students tended to avoid this rather demanding class.

Mentioning postgraduate students draws attention to a form of history of economics teaching which can only be briefly mentioned in this already long paper, but which needs to be explicitly included because it was teaching through supervision of Masters or Ph.D. theses. All in all, I supervised seven Ph.D. students in the history of economics, starting with Dave Clark in 1969 and finishing with Mathew Smith in 2000; in between I supervised the doctoral research of Tony Aspromourgos, Paul Augimeri, John Carson, Chris Guest and Mark Donoghue. Memorable Masters students, whose History of Economics research I supervised, include Murray Milgate, Michael Danes, Peter Dogherty, Peter Kriesler, Sylvana Caloni and Neil Hart: a rich crop, from whom, invariably, I learnt at least as much as I may have imparted to them during my supervision. I note that initially I encouraged students wishing to do postgraduate work with me to do a Masters by thesis at Sydney, to be followed by a Ph.D. overseas. Given the research experience obtained from their Masters studies, the Ph.D. would be more rapidly completed.

All in all, I have enjoyed a rich and enjoyable teaching experience in the history of economic thought, largely because of the quality of students who were attracted by the fascination of its rich and diverse subject matter. In this I have been extraordinarily lucky, given the bleak outlook for teaching the subject in many universities world-wide, including those in Australia.

### III

At least four general conclusions can be drawn from the practice of History of Economic Thought teaching at the University of Sydney.

First of all, it can be pointed out that the three types of teaching of History of Economic Thought identified by Bernard Corry (1999) were all used at one time or another at the University of Sydney. The broad survey course ('from Moses to Marshall', as Corry used to describe it) was in use for virtually the whole period from 1920 onwards, occasionally submerged though it was under the heading of Economics IV. As shown previously, this was in fact devoted to surveying the major developments in economics in the nineteenth century. The details of these

survey courses have of course changed greatly over the decades, and so has their place in the syllabus. Investigating the development of a specific topic over time was selectively employed at Sydney on many occasions, especially after 1945. The seminar on the theory of rent for Pass with Credit students is a good example, but there were many others (those on the development of business cycle theory, the labour theory of value, the quantity theory of money, and the theory of capital and interest have already been mentioned in this paper; Louis Haddad for some time lectured on the history of growth theory). A 'great books' or 'economic classics' course was given during the 1920s and 1930s and, under that very title, continuously from 1973. In addition, History of Economic Thought courses at the University of Sydney have addressed the needs of three types of students: undergraduate pass students, honours students and postgraduate students, including those undertaking higher-degree research for a Masters or Ph.D.

Compulsion was a feature of History of Economic Thought teaching at the University of Sydney for a large part of the period under consideration. The survey course in HET was compulsory for all Faculty students from the early 1920s (except for Accountancy students who were completing a number of specified subjects) and explicitly again from 1938 to 1961, when the 'old by-laws' ceased to operate. This period of general compulsion was in fact continuous, since the compulsory Economics IV from 1925 to 1937 was substantially composed of material formerly taught in the History of Economic Thought course. Until 1971, compulsory HET was maintained for all Faculty honours students in every school. This second form of compulsion was unsatisfactory for at least two reasons. First, it implied having to teach unwilling students, an imposition both on those students and on their teachers. Secondly, it greatly discouraged pass students from attempting HET, as the data for student numbers presented in Table 1 fully demonstrate. From 1971, compulsion has been completely abandoned for all HET students, resulting in better classes and, most definitely, more enjoyable teaching.

Compulsion of HET at Sydney was justified by course descriptions on at least two occasions. In 1948 compulsory HET was defended as 'an attempt to give some perspective' to the theory courses of Economics I-IV. This was largely the perspective of 'the interaction of economic conditions and economic thought', illustrated through an overview of the problems faced by economists in the past. The 1954 *Calendar* expanded on this type of justification of, and rationale for, compulsory HET for Economics Faculty students, by commenting at length on the nature of this supplementation, as shown in Section I of this paper, which quoted the relevant extract from the 1954 course description. At the honours level (1962-70), compulsion for honours students was partly defended on the pragmatic ground that its results would provide a common yardstick of the standards reached in their final year by students across all honours disciplines within the Faculty of Economics.

Sydney teaching of HET in some of its aspects also encouraged ventures in reprinting economic classics. The late 1940s and early 1950s saw such reprints specifically as student aids, since what was being reprinted were short but significant extracts from books, articles, and even government reports. Seminar requirements for honours students motivated the facsimile reprinting of the 1810 Bullion Report and several papers by Malthus, effectively a first series of such reprints. From the 1980s, a second series of reprints was completed for sale (initially largely to Japan) and later as a useful teaching device when book reviews of such classics were part of the HET pass coursework requirements. From the fifth

reprint onwards, these reprints were published under the auspices of the Centre for the Study of the History of Economic Thought, which I directed from 1989 until its demise in 2001.

This final observation completes my reflections on HET teaching at the University of Sydney. As a person who was closely involved in that teaching for forty years, my final remark can only be to express the wish that HET teaching in its various forms may long continue at the University of Sydney.

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### **APPENDIX I: Student Enrolments in History of Economic Thought at the University of Sydney (1920-2001): selected years**

1920	20		
1931	19	[i.e. students effectively taking it by completing Economics IV]	
1941	48		
1950	105		
1960	65		
1964	23	(4)	1983 40 33
1965	12	(1)	1984 28 26
1966	17	(2)	1985 32 29
1967	16	(1)	1986 45 37
1968	20	(2)	1987 53 44
1969	28	(0)	1988 31 28
1970	14	(3)	1989 26 21
1971	38	(8)	1990 35 24
1972	33		1991 45 45
1973	30		1992 25 25
1974	23	17 [who sat for examination]	1993 39 33
1975	29	25	1994 27 24
1976	[not available]		1995 18 18
1977	55	40	1996 50 44
1978	50	40	1997 22 21
1979	29	27	1998 [not available]
1980	34	29	1999 57 55
1981	36	32	2000 28 26
1982	32	22	2001 46 35

**Source:** University *Calendars* 1920 to 1975, various volumes; personal records (1974-2001).

**Note:** For 1964 to 1971 the figure in brackets indicates the number of pass students included in total enrolments; from 1974, the first column lists the number of officially enrolled students, and the second those who attempted the examinations.

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