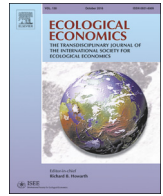




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Methodological and Ideological Options

Re-establishing Justice as a Pillar of Ecological Economics Through Feminist Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Ecological economics has long claimed distributive justice as a central tenet, yet discussions of equity and justice have received relatively little attention over the history of the field. While ecological economics has aspired to be transdisciplinary, its framing of justice is hardly pluralistic. Feminist perspectives and justice frameworks offer a structure for appraising the human condition that bridges social and ecological issues. Through a brief overview of the uptake of feminist perspectives in other social sciences, this paper outlines an initial justice-integration strategy for ecological economics by providing both a point of entry for readers to the vast and diverse field of feminist economic thought, as well as a context for the process of disciplinary evolution in social sciences. We also critique ecological economics' toleration of neoclassical mainstays such as individualism that run counter to justice goals. The paper concludes with a call for ecological economics practitioners and theorists to learn from other social sciences and elevate their attention to justice, to open possibilities for more dynamic, inter-disciplinary, community-oriented, and pluralistic analysis.

1. Introduction

Feminist perspectives have long provided a rich critique of the sources and influence of power in establishing norms in society (Marilley, 1996; Offen, 1988; Snyder, 2008). One of the most dominant and influential set of norms stems from the discipline of economics and its influence in education, management, and policy. Economics as a worldview is characterized as highly individualistic in focus, nearly single-minded in the promotion of privatization and markets as the organizing mechanisms for society, and exceptionally resistant to the influence of other disciplines and perspectives (Gowdy and Erickson, 2005). Economics is often promoted as the “most scientific of the social sciences” by its practitioners (Colander, 2005), guided by “efficiency as an objective truth rule” (Bromley, 1990). However, as feminist economist Julie Nelson (1992, p. 107) notes, “Economics, as a social endeavor, reflects some points of view, favored by the group that makes the rules for the discipline, and neglects others.”

Questioning and posing new “rules of the discipline” has been a hallmark of ecological economics, including broadening the goals of analysis beyond efficiency to include the scale of the economic system relative to the supporting ecosystem and the equitable distribution of the benefits and burdens of economic cooperation (Daly, 1992).

However, while ecological economics was founded on both a scientific and moral critique of the mainstream, research on the ethical dimensions of economics and society has received little attention (Spash, 2013). For instance, Castro E Silva and Teixeira (2011) found less than 3% of papers published in *Ecological Economics* from 1989 through 2009 focused on ethics, equity, and justice. Though ecological economics has aspired to be transdisciplinary, welcoming many viewpoints, the lack of discourse surrounding justice raises the question of whether the “social endeavor” of ecological economics is, in Nelson's words, “favored” by some groups to the “neglect [of] others”.

Feminist theory provides the basis for one such group of viewpoints that has been generally neglected in the field of economics, and only marginally influential within the discourse of ecological economics (e.g., Nelson, 2013; Perkins, 1997, 2009). Understanding why economics has been relatively closed to various feminist perspectives may help reveal similar tendencies within ecological economics. Concerns for justice and fairness within mainstream economics have focused largely on the individual's right to choose rather than broader social concerns or unequal power dynamics. In particular, the singular goal of allocative efficiency in the core neoclassical welfare economics model accepts the existing distribution of power, wealth, and income as a given, with little attention to issues of discrimination or injustice in

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market relations (Pujol, 1992).

Other social sciences have more successfully integrated feminist ideas, and we believe this could provide lessons for reinvigorating the justice discourse in ecological economics. Fields such as anthropology that embraced feminist perspectives early on have become more connected to biology, rooted in a deeper time perspective, and have incorporated a reflexive and interdisciplinary scope (Cook, 1983; Stacey and Thorne, 1985; Crasnow, 2006; Rupp, 2006). Geography has also made strides toward mainstreaming feminist perspectives through its integration of gendered issues with concerns for the physical and social composition of the earth as space and place (Johnson, 2012). Psychology has also begun to reflect feminist influences by highlighting the complexities of biological and cultural imperatives in human interactions and environmental influences (Clayton and Myers, 2015). While these avenues of feminist integration are not exhaustive, and do not include all variants of feminism, they offer models for the inclusion of feminist thinking in different fields.

In this paper, we revisit the roots of justice in ecological economics and consider their alignment with the individualistic, maximizing discourse of economics. We offer a cursory outline of feminist principles and their justice implications for the purpose of providing a point of entry into this vast literature for an ecological economics audience. We then outline disciplinary evolution as a process for adopting feminist principles through examples from other social science disciplines. In this, we explore the integration of more collective forms of justice via feminist theory and identify lessons we believe are applicable to ecological economics. We conclude by proposing some ways that ecological economics can move beyond the limited scope of justice incorporated in the early framing of ecological economics, and the lack of sustained discourse in its more recent development that have limited the field's ability to address the socio-ecological goals necessary for a sustainable economic system. Ecological economics as a field can learn from the uptake of feminist theory in other social sciences in order to incorporate a collective justice framework in re-envisioning its ethical foundations.

2. Building a Feminist Foundation

When feminism emerged along with the social movements of abolitionists and suffragettes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the founders sought to disrupt systems of oppression. The first wave of modern feminist thinking began in France in the 1880s (Offen, 1988), and was inspired in the U.S. in part by the mobilization of women in antislavery campaigns (Marilley, 1996). Changes in women's traditional roles due to industrialization, increased access to education, and broader participation in the public sphere played significant roles in establishing a Western cultural context rooted in the empowerment of women (Buechler, 1990).

While the feminist movement gained momentum in political arenas and made some headway in furthering women's education in the sciences, it was not until the mid-20th century that some in academia took a critical stance on sex and gender discrimination (Crasnow et al., 2015). At this time, women's involvement in higher education was still seen as eccentric and novel, especially in scientific fields (Bix, 2004).

When feminist perspectives finally entered the social sciences more broadly in the 1960s and 70s, this again coincided with social movements such as campaigns for civil rights, reproductive freedom, and environmentalism, inspired in a similar manner to the abolitionist and suffrage movements of the 19th century. The broadening of the feminist perspective included an emphasis on unequal power relations and the recognition of societal needs beyond those of individuals. With the rise of intersectional gendered perspectives that include race, Indigeneity, sexuality, and other factors of identity, feminist thought became focused on achieving collective forms of justice that favor social, economic, and cultural rights over more individualistic, civil, or political priorities (Collins et al., 2010).

While early developments in feminist theory have been commonly characterized as a first wave, developing through the 19th and early 20th centuries, and a second wave through the 1960s and 70s, this description obfuscates a more nuanced evolution of thinking among feminist scholars (Gillis and Munford, 2004). Since the 1990s, the wave analogy has been de-emphasized due to its failure to reflect the varied experiences of women shaped by social and economic contexts around the world. However, an often-described “third wave” characterizes post-Reagan and post-Thatcher movements that highlighted intergroup inequalities and the role of the state in facilitating provision for people as a group, rather than individuals providing for themselves.

Third-wave feminist and so-called fourth-wave or postmodern feminist movements have focused on the differences within gender groups rather than only between genders. Elements of intersectionality theory, postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonial theory, and Marxist feminism have all played significant roles in the movements beyond the second-wave (Mann and Huffman, 2005). Multi-dimensionality has become central to these studies, especially concerning the complexity of how gender interacts with other forms of inequality. Intra-group disparities, such as the differences in women's wellbeing based on factors including race, sexuality, and social class, show the uniqueness of individual experience within contexts of differential social power.

Feminist thinking stretches far beyond the so-called “waves” analogy, and we offer here only a cursory overview of this epistemological umbrella. The evolution of feminist theory and scholarship has provided multiple points of contact and overlap with the social sciences, with differing levels of uptake. For example, McIntosh (1983) characterized five phases of curricular revision in higher education from an exclusionary framework toward the full inclusion of women's experiences. First, a “womanless” phase focuses on the perspectives of privileged white males as universal, ignoring other groups. Second, famous women are acknowledged. Next, women are included in analyses as problematic under existing paradigms. Then, in a “women as history” phase, concern for diverse and unique perspectives of women is considered. Finally, a restructured paradigm emerges that rejects hierarchical thinking. These phases touch on different forms of concern for justice, but with a common thread of concern for deep social injustices, rather than injustices that are personal or isolated.

McIntosh's now 35-year-old timeline, however, does not address the type of catalyst needed to start the steps to incorporate collective justice in traditionally individualistic fields or topics. Even if practitioners are acutely aware of the need for a new perspective, they may be at a loss for addressing this if the paradigm they face is inherently unjust or incompatible with systemic thinking.

3. Feminist Theory in the Social Sciences

To focus our discussion on bridging ecological economics and feminist perspectives, it is useful to understand the specific principles that have enabled various social sciences to adopt feminist views. Surveying the emergence and evolution of feminist theory in the social sciences allows us to explore catalysts for change in advancing collective justice as an ethical framework for ecological economics. For example, anthropology is a relative success story, with broad inclusion of women's voices and perspectives across the field. Also, geography is a field where feminist notions were once viewed as radical, but are now a mainstay. Additionally, psychology provides an example of an ongoing struggle over accepting feminist voices, but a promising basis for shifting mainstream thinking. We review these cases in contrast to the field of economics, where the neoclassical paradigm has proved much more resistant to feminist theory.

3.1. Anthropology

Although women have a deep and respected history as researchers

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