

Cash on the Table

I

Introduction

Markets and Moralities

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Moral values inform economic behavior.¹ On its face, this is an unsailable proposition. Think of the often spiritual appeal of consumer goods or the value-laden stakes of upward or downward mobility. Think about the central role that moral questions regarding poverty, access to health care, the tax code, property and land rights, and corruption play in the shaping of modern governments, societies, and social movements. Think of fair trade coffee and organic produce and the thrift expressed in Walmart's everyday low prices. The moral aspects of the marketplace have never been so contentious or consequential.

Despite this relationship, the realm of economics is often treated as a world unto itself, a domain where human behavior is guided not by emotions, beliefs, moralities, or the passions that fascinate anthropologists but by the hard calculus of rational choices. The attraction of this *Homo economicus* paradigm rests in its parsimony, in the way it translates the chaos of everyday life and human behavior into a metric system complete with mathematical models based on assumptions about self-interest and maximization (see Beckert 2002; Carrier 1997; Fullbrook 2004; Stiglitz 1993). Authors of economics textbooks often liken the workings of markets to natural forces, distancing themselves from the field's historical roots in philosophy and ethics. On issues of value and morality, many economists plead

agnosticism—it is not a question of good or bad, they say, but rather of efficient or inefficient (see Becker 1996; Becker and Becker 1996; Samuelson 1976). Trade restrictions, national borders, political corruption, and religious values are seen as barriers to a fluid and healthy marketplace (or “distortions”). Steven Levitt’s (Levitt and Dubner 2005:13) bestseller *Freakonomics* proclaims, “Morality represents the way we would like the world to work and economics represents how it actually does work.” Yet, the dominant economic paradigm itself has become a morality, laden with unchecked cultural assumptions and confident about making the world in its own secular image.

Certainly, we are driven by self-interest, but not solely, as most economists, including those represented in the chapters that follow, would readily concede. Still, best-selling books like *Freakonomics*, *Discover Your Inner Economist* (Cowen 2007), and *The Undercover Economist* (Harford 2007) convey a message of ethical agnosticism about human behavior (just letting the facts speak for themselves) that fuels the conceit of a certain brand of economics popular among policy-makers, pundits, and think tanks. This popularity comes at the very moment in which the field of economics is witnessing a proliferation of behavioral, experimental, and historical approaches that constitute a multisided challenge to the assumptions of the conventional neoclassical paradigm. Under the broad banner of “heterodox economics,” we find Austrian school adherents, Marxists, and behaviorists, as well as a growing number calling for a “post-autistic” approach to economics (to use the rallying cry of rebellious French students in 2000) that moves beyond the “uncontrolled use” of mathematics and better engages with empirical realities (see www.paecon.net). More toward the mainstream, behavioral economics is working to redefine the limits of rationality and document biases that subvert rationality (see Ariely 2008; Kahneman 2011; Thaler 1992; among others). These movements in economics open the door to fruitful collaboration across traditional disciplinary boundaries.

Anthropology, too, claims to describe how the world works. But it tells a much different story about economic behavior. If anthropologists have produced any laws of their own, one is certainly that economic behavior is everywhere embedded in moral, cultural, and political systems (Gudeman 2001; Lamont 2000; Sahlin 1972; Sayer 2006; Wilk 1996). This story does not have the traction of the more parsimonious one of neoclassical economics, but it does converge with much mainstream thinking worldwide (Fogel 2000).

Anthropologists have historically tended to focus on the corrosive effects of markets on traditional lifeways and the ways in which global

markets disadvantage marginalized peoples. This perspective can make engagement with economists difficult because they tend to see markets as the primary route for folks to achieve the good life as the economists themselves envision it. Instead, as we suggest in the dialogue in chapter 2, we should view markets as technologies that can be used toward various ends. It may even be the case, as James Ferguson suggests in chapter 9, that market interactions can strengthen and promote social relations, as well as erode them (see also Miller 1998a, 2008).

On the other hand, economists often have difficulty allowing that markets are embedded in particular social and political power structures and that “free” market transactions are often less free than we might think. These realities are not as neat and clean as mathematical modeling requires, but without them, we cannot expect to understand what Deirdre McCloskey calls the sacred and profane values that influence our decisions.

The title of this volume emerged from our seminar and the observation that if anthropologists could view markets a bit more ecumenically and if economists could view them a bit more politically, then great value—cash on the table—could be found in bringing these perspectives together. Much is at stake in understanding the moral dimensions of economic behavior and markets. Public debates over executive compensation, the fair trade movement, and recent academic inquiries into the limitations of rational-choice paradigms all point to the relevance of moral values in our economic decision-making processes.

This volume builds on the anthropological tradition of seeing economic activity as embedded in social worlds (Beckert 2002; Gudeman 2008; Mauss 2001; Polanyi 1944; Strathern 1988; Veblen 1899; Weber 1978). Our approach sees markets as social constructions that are shot through with values—ideas about what is good and bad, fair and unfair. Much of this approach turns on ethnographic examinations of how global economic systems touch down in local and national contexts, how moral values are marshaled by local actors to engage with and negotiate market forces and economic processes, and how moral values are deployed by global economic assemblages—international trade partnerships, structural adjustment policies, multinational corporations, and economic development organizations—in order to discipline and invite consensus among local actors and social groups.

We argue for a richer consideration of the moral and ethical values that define self-understandings, social relations, and economic behaviors in local settings. Anthropological research can make a special contribution to economics by illuminating the complex local conditions and value systems

in which economic activity takes shape. This contribution includes demonstrating how economic activities are embedded in projects undertaken with moral perspectives about what is good, fair, or just and a range of possible worlds in mind. In turn, economics can explain how markets tend to promote certain modalities of behavior and how incentive structures work, along with the surprising correlations we find in actual market behavior.

MORAL ECONOMIES

All economies are “moral” in the sense that they embody and reproduce values. Economic systems are built upon assumptions—often, taken-for-granted and naturalized assumptions—about what is good, desirable, worthy, ethical, and just. These are culturally informed and historically particular assumptions, even though some actors (say, policy-makers, neo-classical economists, or human rights advocates) struggle to codify certain values as “universal.”

Economic systems aggressively promote moral values as part and parcel of their normal function as evolving historical formations (Polanyi 1944; Sayer 2000; Sen 1979). Struggles over the values that are normalized and naturalized as “universal” define a dynamic arena of social practice and cultural difference. In fact, what we find ethnographically is much like the dialectical interplay Stephen Gudeman (2008) describes between market and nonmarket realms, which is at times symbiotic and at times parasitic. A key starting point for the present collaboration has been the move to historicize the moral values that underpin neoliberal free trade ideals and to parlay and contrast those values with alternative moral frameworks, such as fair trade and antiglobalization movements.

The moral economy is understood here as more than just a local tradition. This usage contrasts with the sense of the term made famous in the work of James Scott (1977, 1985), who uses “moral economy” to refer to the continuing force of localized precapitalist traditions—especially, moral values about fair prices and economic practices—in the face of capitalist development and expansion (see also Thompson 1971). For Scott, local moral values are a means of subaltern resistance to capitalism, enlivening everyday forms of resistance and thwarting the consolidation of consensual, hegemonic power.

Yet, a general valuation of all subaltern behavior as “resistance” misses nuanced aspects of how local actors negotiate societal forces (Appadurai 1996; Fischer and Benson 2006; Herzfeld 2005) and more subtle views of power as contextual and multisided (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). Recent approaches to the study of power also rub against Scott’s tendency

to equate the moral with local tradition as opposed to global processes (Fox 1991; Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Moral values, in particular, take shape at the intersection of universal ethical models (such as human rights or neoclassical economics), the ubiquitous reality of uneven development and fragmented political membership, and the deeply held concerns that define ordinary life in local settings.

Adam Smith is best remembered for *The Wealth of Nations*, but his other great work, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, opens the door to the approach we pursue here. McCloskey (2006:306) sees Smith as a “virtue ethicist for a commercial age,” and, indeed, he was centrally concerned with the moral implications of economic behaviors and systems. He famously described the human “propensity to truck, barter, and exchange,” but he also saw sympathy as an original part of human nature for both “the civilized and the brutish.”² Smith was contemptuous of self-love, but, as Albert Hirschman (1977) shows, he reconciled the passion of self-love with the discipline of reason to reveal “interests,” the pursuit of which is seen as mutually beneficial to both self and society.

Just as important for Smith was how the original human passion for sympathy (or “fellow-feeling”) acts as a counterweight to self-love. In contrast to the post-Kantian universalizing approach to morals, Smith takes a very empirical, even anthropological approach, seeing moral values such as sympathy as arising from social interaction. For Smith, sympathy, the ability to identify with others, is both a fundamental part of human nature and what keeps self-love in check (if only, perhaps, because injury to another causes sympathetic pain in oneself). While anthropologists will contest the universal model of how basic emotions like sympathy are understood and enacted, this position remains an underappreciated aspect of Smith’s work and encourages a rethinking of the latter-day moral agnosticism that has come to define the invisible hand allegory.

Living up to the moral expectations of particular value systems is in many ways the stock-in-trade of human existence, and this forward-looking, aspirational quality of the internalization of culturally produced virtues is what drives “agency.” Jens Beckert (2011) writes of the power of daydreams and imaginings of the future in the construction of consumer identities, and elsewhere (Fischer and Benson 2006), I have made a similar argument for understanding the role of desire in producer identities. Although words like *morals* and *virtues* are often used in popular discourse to denote timeless, essential cultural structures, our perspective sees them as the product of ongoing processes of socially situated negotiation, continually enacted through the dialectic of everyday social life yet partially

defined through presumptive continuities (Fischer 1999; see also Beckert 2002; Giddens 1984).

Alasdair MacIntyre (1981, 1988) calls attention to how virtues saturate people's everyday projects. MacIntyre approaches virtue as excellence within a given "practice," a perspective that moves away from the universality of cardinal virtues and allows for greater cultural latitude, and he writes of the fulfillment that comes from doing something well for its own sake (internal goods) as defined by a social group ("moral community"). This approach suggests an ethnographic basis for using virtues to define practices and excellence. It also suggests a public policy correlate: a social contract could introduce incentive structures to promote long-term, socially engaged metapreferences and moral stances.

That behavior is situationally dependent may invalidate the idea of absolute virtues (Appiah 2008), but it does not negate the power of normative moral ideals and individual strivings to attain a certain morally laden identity. This fact also points to the danger of our romanticizing moral communities: the consensus such communities require can as easily be oppressive as nurturing, as Jürgen Habermas reminds us, whereas social norms in local worlds can also reflect the weight of dominant ideologies, including free market principles grafted onto local value systems.

This reframing of moral economy allows for a sharpened and more specific understanding of economic globalization. It is through the prism of moral values that ordinary people engage with circulating flows of objects, images, and ideas. While moral values reflect the accumulation of historical experience, they also orient people to the future, shape a sense of how things ought to be, define what *better* means, and influence social and economic behaviors (Bourdieu 1977; Holland and Lave 2001; Rosenberg and Harding 2005). In this way, moral values serve as a fundamental linchpin linking global processes and local worlds (Ackerly 2008; Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007; Das 2006; Kleinman 2006).

People moralize their economic behavior and consciously so. The politics often embedded in the consumption of fair trade or "green" products does not merely evidence an individual preference; it also reflects a moral project that has likely been influenced by popular culture, governments, and corporations. To reduce moral and cultural values to an individualistic and monetary "utility" is to miss an opportunity to understand the fundamentally social and contextual dimensions of human behavior. The tenets that morality matters in ordinary people's economic decisions and attitudes and that values and norms are historically particular, however, are contradicted by market fundamentalists who view moralities and moral beliefs as

superfluous, nothing more than secondary explanations that detract from an objective account of natural laws.

WORKING WITH ECONOMICS

In 1958 John Kenneth Galbraith (1998:215) presciently observed that “in the United States, as in other western countries, we have for long had a respected secular priesthood whose function it has been to rise above questions of religious ethics, kindness and compassion and show how these might have to be sacrificed on the altar of the greater good. That larger good, invariably, was more efficient production.” Yet, he notes, “if the modern corporation must manufacture not only goods but the desire for the goods it manufactures, the efficiency of the first part of this activity ceases to be decisive. One could indeed argue that human happiness would be as effectively advanced by inefficiency in want creation as by efficiency in production. Under these circumstances, the relations of the modern corporation to the people it comprises—their chance for dignity, individuality and full development of personality—may be at least as important as its efficiency. These may be worth having even at a higher cost of production” (1998:213–214).

As Galbraith makes clear, these relations of production are not just a matter of economics but of morality. This approach returns to the foundations of political economy (e.g., Adam Smith, Karl Marx), a moment in which moral considerations were not separated out from more worldly political and economic concerns. Two centuries ago, the separation of moral science and political economy would have been regarded as antithetical to the ambitions of a liberal and decent society and international community.

The idea of humans as rational actors who seek to maximize utility in all areas of life can be revealing. But much rests on how utility and efficiency are defined. In dominant models of price theory and the efficient market hypothesis (see Fama 1970; Samuelson 1965), the rationality of utility maximization is most often based on immediate monetary returns from a particular transaction, leaving little room for moral considerations, the multiple values that might be at stake in a given transaction, and enduring linkages between behaviors and identity formation. What seems to be immanently empirical research turns out to elide difficult questions about subjective and experiential components of human behavior. Such an economics holds a privileged position in terms of public discourse and political influence. And such explanations have ethical and political consequences. If humans are unwaveringly driven by self-interest, then the economy is

best managed by monetary incentive structures and market mechanisms geared toward a very particular view of efficiency in maximizing utilities (Becker 1996; Becker and Becker 1996; Samuelson 1976).

Of course, the supposed efficiency of the free market model is, itself, a morality that embodies assumptions about who deserves what and what kinds of citizenship are valuable to the national product and national future. For all its claims to moral agnosticism, extreme economic thinking has become a theology (Carrier and Miller 1998; Nelson 2001), laden with unchecked cultural assumptions and confident about making the world in its own secular image and converting fables about behavior's natural causes into everyday common sense.

A growing group of academic economists works on issues that touch on the role of cultural values and moral concerns. Deirdre McCloskey (1998, 2002) critiques the scientific aspirations of econometrics and the strategic uses of numbers that infelicitously seek to purify the real messiness of human values and behavior. George Akerlof (2005) and Amartya Sen (2006) write about the powerful role of identity and culture in conditioning the social networks that embed economic activity. George Akerlof and Rachel Kranton (2005) examine how identity affects commitment and performance within organizations. Robert Frank (1988) documents how economic decisions are informed by a sense of identity and narrative life history. Daniel Kahneman and Richard Thaler (1991) champion experimental methods and behavioral observation to show how psychology influences rationality. These revisions are making possible a more complicated picture of the subjective components of economic behavior that have long been bracketed in utility functions.

The notion that individuals seek to maximize utility through preferences is also being reconceived—with greater appreciation for social forces and social contexts—in terms of Max Weber's (1978) "substantive rationality." This is a framework for understanding human motivations and behaviors that eschews reduction to narrow material considerations or self-interest. Substantive rationalities are patterns of behavior that reflect the influence of cultural norms and moral considerations, as well as the way norms and values are bundled to influence senses of identity and of what kind of personhood is possible at a given moment and given place in history.

The concept of substantive rationality also calls attention to the accumulation of historical experience and the forward-looking lean of moralities in shaping behaviors. Jon Elster (1989:98) writes that "rationality is essentially conditional and future-oriented. Its imperatives are hypothetical; that is, conditional on the future outcomes one wants to realize." If

anthropologists have long held that historical processes and the transmission of norms, knowledge, and expectations are crucial to cultural identities, then social scientists are also beginning to realize the relevance of cultural models of the future and the projects in which people become embroiled. Moral values propagated on a collective scale are crucial to how projects of action and identification materialize and become internalized in people's everyday lives, even perhaps just a trip to the grocery store (Fischer and Benson 2006; Miller 1998a).

Here we should consider “metapreferences,” relatively long-term aspirations and goals that require a whole range of subsidiary preferences and sacrifices and are often tied to identity construction and the presentation of the self in everyday life. Harry Frankfurt (1971) posited a “meta-ranking” of preferences, and subsequent analyses by Amartya Sen (1997) and Albert O. Hirschman (1977) elucidate the powerful role of social and cultural factors in shaping preferences and the importance of seeing preferences as much more than individuated dots on an arc of behavior.

Substantive rationalities and metapreferences often hide behind seemingly irrational behaviors. For example, individuals might forgo the pursuit of immediate or short-term goals with a larger ambition in mind or instead participate in seemingly disadvantageous practices in the short term because, in doing so, they advance toward larger metapreferences. In a similar vein, Frank (1988) argues that being a trustworthy person brings material benefits and long-term trustworthiness is very hard to fake. To reap the opportunities or benefits enabled by such a presentation of self, individuals may need to give up cheating and its short-term gains in pursuit of a long-term metapreference. Such behavior relates the Prudence that McCloskey (2006) writes about—the virtue of putting off immediate pleasure for later, bigger rewards (e.g., saving money, studying, or raising children)—to questions about culture and identity.

As Kenneth Arrow (1974), among others, has shown, trust, loyalty, and honesty have clear economic value and are essential to the efficiency of the economy. Indeed, pursuit of the intrinsic rewards of a value-based system (virtues) is necessary for the workings of free and fair exchange. Businesses would crash if employees did only what they were explicitly told to do (or were explicitly paid to do); work-to-rule strikes can virtually stop production simply by following rules to the letter.

Akerlof and Kranton (2000, 2005; Akerlof 2007) observe that by focusing on monetary incentives, standard economic price theory systematically ignores important types of motivation, particularly the role of identity. In much anthropology and sociology, identity plays a central role in our

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understandings of motivations and actions. If preference structures are not oriented only toward immediate material rewards, we may consider a broader range of sociocultural resources and constraints. But human behavior is generally not discussed in terms of incentives and utility. In fact, many anthropologists and sociologists are suspicious of the rational, instrumental, pecuniary connotations of those terms (Sahlins 2008). Empirical research by behavioral economists like Akerlof and Kranton shows that nonmonetary motivations such as social identity are important influences on economic behavior. The extent to which these ideas challenge the methodological individualism of neoclassical economics cannot be overstated. Behavioral economists argue that utility functions can (and should) be expanded to incorporate issues of identity and culture. Even so, the definition of identity at play in this growing field has a more sociological than anthropological ring to it. For example, Akerlof (2007) asserts that identity is closely tied to social norms but that these are usually not moral or ethical views.

SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ECONOMY

In a survey of moral views of the market society, sociologists Marion Fourcade and Kieran Healy (2007) identify three conventional paradigms for studies of economic behavior and markets. First is the view of the market as a civilizing force, an “invisible hand” that produces public goods. The market here is understood to be virtuous and harmonious as a whole, no matter how selfish its constituent parts may be—indeed, it functions because of such sentiments. Market forces are said to discourage racism, sexism, and other “nonrational” behaviors. Free market commerce is said to instill particular virtues, such as prudence, temperance, and justice (McCloskey 2006), as well as trust and cooperation (Ensminger 2004; Henrich et al. 2004; Silk 2005). Second is the view of the market as a destructive force involving coercion and exclusion, alienation and envy. This perspective is at the heart of Karl Marx’s critique of capitalism. It also prevails in critical scholarship on intellectual property rights, where information and ideas are controlled by individual entities, often at the expense of a common good or well-being (Coombe 1998; Correa 2000). Third, the market may be seen as a system shaped out of cultural and institutional legacies. Different kinds of capitalism are said to exist in different regions and under different conditions; therefore, markets embody the moral values, cultural patterns, and economic rationalities of particular times and places.

Anthropologists have examined regional differences in the organization

and practices of markets and corporations. This literature on vernacular capitalism follows the Polanyian tradition of understanding economic practices as culturally and socially embedded (see Becker 2009; Hall and Soskice 2001; Streeck and Yamamura 2001). For example, anthropologists have studied the cultural and economic particularities of a baby food factory in postsocialist Poland (Dunn 2004), along with other financial institutions and practices, bringing into relief the social, cultural, and moral worlds of financiers and stockbrokers in contrast to the supposedly value-neutral operation of markets (Hart 2001; Ho 2009; Maurer 2005; Zaloom 2006).

In these studies, the abstraction of a single global capitalism is usefully reconceived in terms of “global capitalisms” situated in specific settings. This literature addresses local and regional variation in order to register a theoretical and political critique of the formalist assumptions of neoclassical economics. But a substantivist focus on embedded economies can deflect attention from the fact that transnational corporations straddle multiple local worlds. These corporations strategically exploit cultural differences to gain political and economic advantages, actively constructing or objectifying differences rather than simply adapting to them (Ong 1999).

Recent work in economic anthropology relates to a fourth perspective, offered by Fourcade and Healy—the market as a set of scientific, moral, and institutional projects. Influenced by Weber and Foucault, this perspective views markets as saturated with normative moral values that are historically specific and emphasizes the importance of discourses and practices in shaping those values (see Carrier 1998; Miller 1998b). For Beckert (2002), this perspective includes a consideration of path dependencies and the structural conditions of choice, as well as a consideration of power. Anthropologists have shown that the esoteric epistemological frameworks that guide development often do not mesh with local realities, include little consideration of cultural values and the moral stakes of local communities, and even reinforce residual, usually colonial, power structures through the promulgation of elite interests (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1990, 1999; see also Mitchell 2005). The focus on incentives in economic policy making provides a good example of the normalizing force of the market. Incentives are meant to yield “optimal” outcomes, with *optimal* often becoming a code word for *efficient*. Although a particular incentive might disadvantage particular groups or yield uneven outcomes, a generalized logic of optimization becomes normalized. Those capable of adopting rationalities of free market entrepreneurship might benefit, but others might not (Ong 2006).

Much is at stake in crafting rich understandings of the social and moral dimensions of economic behavior and markets, as well as the unchecked moral assumptions built into varieties of economic science itself, not least because the popularity of *Homo economicus* models impacts the realm of public policy, for example, in the imposition of neoliberal economic and political reforms of market integration, liberalization, and deregulation on developing countries. This brand of knowledge production might be seen as having a “performative” rather than simply a referential function. In claiming to describe how the world works, science can also have a “looping” effect, yielding in the empirical world the very modes of thought and action said to be neutral, observable facts (Hacking 2000). The economics profession’s assumption that individualistic self-interest and utility maximization drive behavior has the effect of condoning this very behavior as natural and thus encouraging (and not just describing) it. Scientific theories and concepts (e.g., rational choice) can enter the popular lexicon in such a way that over time, studies in economics are said to “discover” that people think and act in terms of economizing rationalities (see also Timothy Mitchell’s [2005] argument regarding economics and “how a discipline makes its world”). Evidence for this phenomenon exists in experiments that gauge the rationality and self-interest of students from different fields: economics students tend to cooperate less with one another and scholars from other disciplines and more aggressively pursue immediate self-interested maximization (see Carter and Irons 1991; Frank, Gilovich, and Regan 1993; Marwell and Ames 1981).

Institutional frameworks also condition the expression of moral positions (Stout 2010). Caitlin Zaloom’s (2006:139) study of commodity traders shows that the market itself is seen as an ethical arbiter, punishing and disciplining those who exceed its mandates: “The market is the [Chicago Board of Trade] traders’ moral authority...it is both the single truth and the arbiter of a trader’s work.” This position is very different from an artisanal morality of work or indeed from the moralities of most professionals outside the financial industry. Richard Sennett’s (2008) study of skilled work requiring years of training and practice focuses on the intrinsic rewards that come with such practices (see also Kondo’s [1990] look at the construction of identity and craft in a Japanese chocolate factory). In contrast, Robert Jackall’s (1988) study of corporate managers finds that company bureaucracies instill their own ethics, which are bracketed from the outside-of-work moral positions of executives, and that within this milieu, self-interested opportunism becomes habituated through repeated social interaction.

CONCLUSIONS

Understanding the empirical complexities of economic behavior in a globalized world demands an economics that is also a science of moral sentiments and a project of ethical reflection. It demands an economics that goes beyond regression analyses and moves into the real world of what people living in diverse circumstances want or do not want, how they see themselves and who they are becoming, how economic processes such as trade or health care impact their everyday lives, and how they think and feel about the structural conditions in which they live. It requires empirical study of how the world works (the “is”), but also a critical analysis of how things got that way. Despite an aversion to history built into much economics, historical processes are central to any adequate understanding of economic systems and behaviors. Furthermore, empirical and historical research on economies must be linked to moral reflection about how the world might be different (the “ought”).

Ethnographic study itself can be a moral reflection or cultural critique, as when studies of beliefs about justice and equity present alternative models and reveal fractures in dominant epistemological and policy frameworks. More generally, such studies also form a basis for reflection, as when an analysis of an economic institution or a market process galvanizes imaginings about different paths and possibilities. A “conclusion” to an ethnographically grounded, empirical study of economic behavior can be expanded to include both relevant research findings and more conjectural discussion with an eye toward the future. Rather than have esoteric models inform policy decisions and public understandings of social issues, we believe, politics and civil society are best informed by empirical understanding and the prudent, grounded reflection that can come out of it.

Far from rejecting neoclassical economics, we hope to add to conversations already taking place inside and outside the academy about its limitations and policy implications. In particular, we hope to complicate the idea that economic behavior is value free and to argue that all theories and explanations of economic behavior are value laden. This is why moral reflection and epistemological reflexivity must be linked to empirical research: researchers need to apprehend what values or worldviews might be promulgated in descriptions of “how the world actually works.” Ethical deliberation about values—what is the good life, what is the moral life, what are public goods—is a crucial corollary to the empirical study of economics.

In pushing for an economics that is at once inherently reflexive and more finely attuned to the empirical world, precisely because of its wariness

of epistemological assumptions and established theories, we advocate a dialectical movement between what David Hume termed the “is” and the “ought.” We call for greater social empiricism in economics and, simultaneously, critical reflection on the rhetorical and institutional aspects of the science of economics and the moral and policy implications of research findings.

We need a practical and integrative reframing of economics and economic anthropology because we are at a turning point, sometimes termed “late capitalism,” in the development of globalized economies (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). The moral values that could be enforced in more bounded economic systems—and the sense of community they articulated with—are often no longer viable. And while we in the North reap the fruits of global integration, elsewhere, the backlash against the moral implications of neoliberal economic models is growing.

A loud public debate about the morality of sacrificing the security of a strong social contract to the pursuit of globally competitive labor flexibility is occurring in Europe. In the United States, debates over immigration, outsourcing, and environmental issues all bring moral concerns to bear on economic behavior. Ultimately, then, we must speak to the utterly important but still understudied fact that global economic processes foster both normalizing and balkanizing tendencies across local contexts (Friedman 1994). A focus on moralities in specific cultural contexts reveals how local worlds interface with large-scale economic processes in such domains as high finance and science, shifting modes of consumption and identity, global food production, and the rhetoric and research orientations of neo-classical economics itself.

Emphasizing the centrality of values in all economic systems, we advocate studies of economic behavior that work between the “is” and the “ought,” between how the world can be shown to work and how moral principles can be constituted from a discussion that arises between the competing and diverse value systems that research documents. Our emphasis on the dialogical quality of research belies the notion that academic research is simply descriptive; our emphasis on understanding moralities from the ground up counters the tendency to universalize ethical principles based on theoretical models (such as rational choice theory). The solutions to concrete problems are most effectively addressed when knowledge about diverse empirical circumstances is taken into account, even if such circumstances might muddy the neat and tidy models that sell so many books.

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Notes

1. In using the word *moral*, I refer to Kleinman’s (2006) definition of “what matters most” to people. This definition does not imply an absolute or universal morality, but rather contextualized values that orient behavior (see also Sayer 2011).

2. Quotes from Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* included here come from the Wikisource online version available at http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Wealth_of_Nations.