

The Second Karl Mittermaier Symposium on the History and Philosophy of Economics

Johannesburg, 15 – 16 August 2022

“FINDING BETTER WAYS OF DOING ECONOMICS”

Call for Papers

Philosophy of Economics: “If it’s worth doing at all, it must be done in an attempt to gain new insights that will allow one to do better economics.” (Mittermaier ‘Philosophy and Economics’, unpublished 1989)

The second Karl Mittermaier Symposium on the History and Philosophy of Economics will be held in Johannesburg on the 15th and 16th of August 2022.

Karl Mittermaier distinguished clearly between the subject matter of economics and the tools employed in economics; much has been accomplished in developing the tools, but less in understanding the subject matter. The very tools of economics are now employed in different fields of investigation, and so we have an *imperialism of economics*. The objective pursued here is to develop new ways and new intellectual tools to look at the subject matter.

The list of participants includes (amongst others) the following (in alphabetical order):

Pascal Bridel	Uskali Mäki
Melissa Vergara Fernández	Alain Marciano
Andreas Freytag	Nobantu Mbeki
Nils Goldschmidt	Rod O'Donnell
Alan Kirman	Amos Witztum

We welcome contributions from researchers working in various streams of economics and philosophy, relevant to the conference theme. In particular, we encourage contributions in the areas of research suggested by Mittermaier and listed below:

○ *Realism and Nominalism in Economics*

Pareto wrote in a letter “I am the most nominalist of nominalists”. A nominalist attitude was also expressed by J.S. Mill when he made the point that “all definitions are definitions of words only”. This contrasts with the view that some definitions are definitions of things. The nominalist attitude gives rise to a view that the universal terms we use in economic theory are not about things but only words as labels. How influential has this nominalist attitude and the rejection of realism been in economics?

○ *Market Order in History of Economic Thought*

Classical Liberalism was only peripherally concerned with the efficient allocation of resources. Instead, the question of market order had to do with rewarding productive activities and discouraging predatory activities. Today, this question is at least as important as it was at the time of classical liberalism. Furthermore, whereas markets had been considered in older economics traditions as a natural phenomenon, markets can also be understood as having an ideal form that is being promoted.

○ *Conceptual Framework for Facts*

Economic statistics are mostly records of past events, and as such they are “ex post” facts. “Ex ante” facts in economics are harder to come by and where theory portrays preferences, for instance, as “ex ante” facts, they really are just “ex post” facts dressed up as “ex ante” facts. One commentator has recently observed that “economic models which, while admirably internally consistent, seem to be devoid of empirical content” (Kirman).

That humans need to ingest food for survival may count as an “ex ante” fact. A record of the times when they actually did ingest food is a record of “ex post” facts. That individuals prefer more wealth to less may be an “ex ante” fact, but a record of their consumption is a record of “ex post” facts. What about institutions? Can they figure as “ex ante” facts? A fuller treatment of these questions can be found in *The Empirical Content of Economics* (Mittermaier), which can be obtained by return mail by writing to info@kmcpe.co.za.

Perhaps relevant is the idea of “background facts” found in John D Norton’s *Material Theory of Induction* (November 2021): “what separates the good from the bad inductive inferences are background facts—the matter of the inference, as opposed to its form. To put it another way, we locate what authorizes an inductive inference not in some universal, formal schema but in facts that prevail in the domain of the inference.” (p 23). An example of background facts found in the book is that “matter has weight”. Are there “background facts” in the economic domain? Are “background facts” analogues to “ex ante” facts?

We invite submissions of abstracts (300 words maximum) for proposed papers on these themes by **10 June 2022**. Please send abstracts to contact@kmcpe.co.za. Replies will be sent out by 19 June 2022. Additional information can be obtained by emailing to info@kmcpe.co.za.

The Symposium will be held in-person. No registration fees apply.

Organising committee: Samantha Ashman (U. Johannesburg), Chadwin Harris (U. Johannesburg), Jérôme Lange (U. Witwatersrand), Michael Stettler (U. Johannesburg)