

Title Towards an incalculable yet culpable subject: A critique of the notions of the human subject in the discipline of economics.

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Abstract

Different economic discourses conceptualize the human subject in different ways. So far, heterodox (Post-structuralist Marxist, Critical Realist, and Institutional) critical surveys of the discipline of economics have differentiated between individualist and structuralist/holist accounts of the human subject. These critiques proposed to conceptualize the human subject as socially constructed and decentered and emphasized the importance of norms, habits, and rituals. Nevertheless, so far, these heterodox critiques have neglected the questions of responsibility and culpability of the subject. In fact, the notion of responsibility of the human subject became associated, almost exclusively, with hegemonic individualist economic discourses (Neoclassical and New Institutional economics). Furthermore, these discourses mobilized their peculiar notion of "individual" responsibility to justify neoliberal economic policy prescriptions. This paper argues that notions of responsibility and culpability should be reappropriated and redefined by heterodox economic discourses. In order to accomplish this task of resignification, heterodox economic discourses can draw on recent developments in Lacanian psychoanalysis (Slavoj Žižek) and anti-essentialist political theory (Ernesto Laclau). This paper argues that heterodox economics should formulate an incalculable yet culpable notion of the human subject. Only with such a notion of the human subject, we will be able to assert the socially constructed, culturally specific, yet actively transformable fabric of the human subject. While the notion of incalculability signals the historical embedded and overdetermined condition of the human subject, the notion of culpability signals the agency and responsibility of the human subject in her identifications that sustain and reproduce the existing socio-economic hegemony.