Classroom Struggle

The Free-Market Takeover of Economics Textbooks

THOMAS J. DILORENZO

In 1948, when Paul Samuelson published the first edition of *Economics: An Introductory Analysis,* John Kenneth Galbraith forecast "that the next generation would learn its economics from this work." Well, at least one Galbraithian hypothesis has been confirmed. For more than three decades, Samuelson's was the most widely used textbook in introductory economics courses. Now in its 12th edition, the text has sold over three million copies in more than 20 languages.

The students who learned their economics from Samuelson imbibed a Keynesian faith in the manipulation of the economy through adjustments in aggregate demand, as well as the interventionist doctrine that the private sector is inherently unstable and monopolistic, with government regulation necessary to keep the free enterprise system viable. As Samuelson stated in his 1955 edition, "The private economy is . . . like a machine without an effective steering wheel or governor. . . . [Government] policy tries to introduce such a governor or thermostatic device."

Since the early 1970s, however, it has become increasingly likely that economics students will learn a different lesson. A new generation of textbook writers has challenged the liberal Keynesianism of Samuelson and his disciples, drawing instead on free-market, monetarist, and public choice theory. These writers describe the market system as more stable and less monopolistic than Samuelson does; they are less optimistic about the ability of government intervention to make things better rather than worse; they explain the well-documented dangers of expansionary monetary and fiscal policy; they are much more skeptical of deficit spending than Samuelson; and they caution that high taxes may have detrimental supply-side effects.

Together the new free-market writers account for more than half of the roughly two million introductory economics textbooks sold every year. A Samuelson offshoot, by Campbell McConnell of the University of Nebraska, takes about 12 to 15 percent of the market and is the industry's current best-seller. But two of McConnell's three closest competitors are free-market texts: *Economics: Private and Public Choice* by James Gwartney of Florida State University and Richard Stroup of Montana State University, and *Economics* by Edwin G. Dolan of George Mason University. Other prominent free-market textwriters include: Armen Alchian and William Allen (UCLA); Ryan Amacher and Holly Ulbrich (Clemson University); Robert B. Ekelund, Jr. (Auburn University) and Robert D. Tollison (George Mason); Paul Heyne (University of Washington, Seattle); Richard McKenzie (Clemson); Roger LeRoy Miller (University of Miami); and Roy J. Ruffin and Paul R. Gregory (University of Houston). It is a sign of the shift in economic thinking that Samuelson's 12th edition, coauthored by William Nordhaus, is struggling to remain even among the top 10 textbooks.

Samuelson's Biases

Samuelson made no effort to hide the political bias of his textbook. Our "capitalistic system," he wrote in his 1955 edition, "may depart from what is considered a social optimum in three main ways: through improper distribution of income, through monopoly, and through fluctuations in employment." No such imperfections hampered the public sector, however. "It is the present writer's belief, as exemplified throughout the book, that all these evils can be ameliorated by appropriate [government] policies."

It is almost laughable today to read the panglossian view of government intervention in Samuelson's early editions. His 1955 edition told students that "All the . . . powers of the government's Treasury Department are used to keep financial panics from developing and to stem them when they do." The Federal Reserve Board, he asserted, "is directly responsible to Congress; and whenever any conflict arises between its making a profit and the public interest, it acts according to the public interest without question." According to his 1967 edition, "The Federal Reserve Banks have for their sole purpose the promotion of the public interest. . . . The Central Bank pursues a generally stabilizing . . . policy."

Samuelson frequently pointed to instability in private markets, but rarely conceded the possibility that government intervention might make economic instability even worse. Macroeconomic stabilization policy was unequivocally desirable, since "by means of appropriately reinforc-

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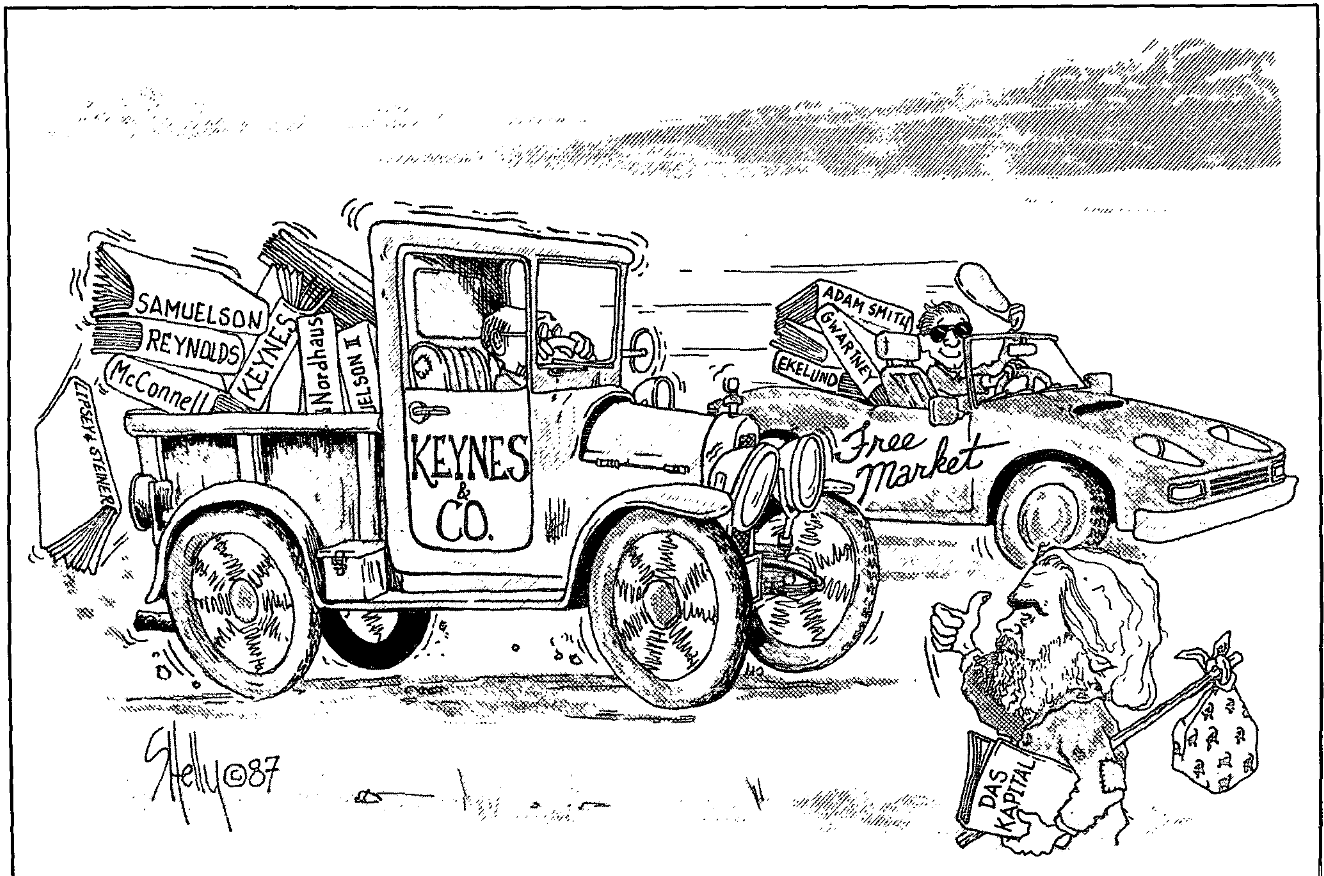

Drawing by Shelly Fishman

ing monetary and fiscal policies, our mixed-enterprise system can avoid the excesses of boom and slump and can look forward to healthy progressive growth" (1967).

Merely stating noble objectives was sufficient reason for praising government intervention: "The Employment Act of 1946 represents an important innovation in our republic, affirming the responsibility of the government for employment opportunities and setting up executive and congressional machinery for policy action." Those who disagreed—"a sizable body of conservative opinion"—were futilely swimming against the tides of history: "With nations all over the world moving increasingly toward a planned state, and with the American electorate showing an unwillingness to turn the hour hand back toward laissez faire, [conservatives] naturally tend to be rather despondent" (1967).

Samuelson's textbooks repeatedly stressed the "imperfections" of competition in most American industries, and faulted the free enterprise system for "the widespread presence of monopoly elements." His analysis reflected the standard economic approach to the study of markets in the 1950s and 1960s, in which the economists' model of perfect competition was held out as an ideal norm for all industries. In a "perfectly" competitive industry, there are many firms; entry is free; information is costless and all market participants know everything they need to know; capital mobility is costless; products are all identical; every firm charges the same price, which equals marginal cost; and no producer can have any influence on his price.

From the perspective of the perfect competition model, nearly every industry exercises some degree of market power and should therefore, in Samuelson's judgment, submit to "democratic controls." The model's assumption of perfect information rules out the need for advertising; the product homogeneity assumption leads to the conclusion that product differentiation and research and development spending are monopolistic. According to Samuelson's 1967 edition, "only potatoes, tobacco, wheat, and cotton come within our . . . definition of perfect competition."

By contrast, Samuelson virtually ignored the pervasive phenomenon of *government-sanctioned* monopoly through licensing, franchises, grandfather clauses, regulation, taxation, antitrust harassment, government ownership of productive facilities, procurement policy, and restrictions on advertising. The only examples he offered of such state-sponsored monopoly were "a few utilities."

Countercyclical Fiscal Policy

Comparing the private economy to "a machine without an effective steering wheel," Samuelson taught that countercyclical fiscal policy could provide the economy with the proper guidance and stability it needs:

> When private investment shoots up too high, it seems natural to ask that the government should try to compensate by curtailing public investment and expenditure and increasing its tax collections. On the other hand, when private investment and consumption go off into a slump, the government is then to compensate by stepping up its previously postponed

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expenditures and by reducing its tax collections. According to the countercyclical view, the government budget need not be in balance in each and every month or year; on the contrary, during inflationary times, the budget should show a surplus of tax receipts over expenditures so that the public debt can be reduced. But when bad times come, then the budget should show a deficit of taxes over expenditures, with the public debt returning to its previous level. Only over the whole business cycle need the budget be in balance. (1955)

Students are now exposed to the idea that the roots of monopoly are more likely to be found in the legislature than in abstract ideas of "imperfect competition."

Samuelson offered no supporting evidence for his confidence that fiscal fine-tuning of the economy would be successful. Instead, he drew *theoretical* diagrams explaining the "stabilizing effect of countercyclical finance, in contrast to . . . how national income would fluctuate if the budget were balanced in each . . . year" (1955). Other leading textbook writers of the 1950s and 1960s—Campbell R. McConnell, Lloyd G. Reynolds, Richard Lipsey and Peter Steiner—shared this faith in countercyclical budgeting. The most prominent dissenter from the deliberate creation of budget deficits was James Buchanan, who argued in *Public Principles of Public Debt* (1958) that deficit spending imposed a burden on future generations, depleted the nation's capital stock, and would be inflationary if the debt is monetized. Such views were dismissed by McConnell as the residue of "awe, ignorance, and . . . fear."

Samuelson's Laffer Curve

Along with other Keynesian textwriters, Samuelson helped undermine the traditional belief that saving was virtuous and essential to prosperity by fueling private investment. They maintained that oversaving (and, consequently, underspending) had caused the Great Depression and that saving was harmful to economic growth as long as there was less than full employment. "Never again," wrote Samuelson, "can people be urged . . . to save more in order to restore prosperity" (1955). Samuelson favored taxation of interest income that would deter saving, much as cigarette and liquor taxes discouraged smoking and drinking. And, Samuelson asked, "What becomes of the argument that wealthy people are needed to provide saving? We see it go into reverse" (1955). The "paradox of thrift" was invoked on behalf of a progressive income tax system.

Samuelson acknowledged that fiscal policy could have important supply-side effects. There were "some costs" to progressive tax rates "because of taxation effects upon incentives, risk taking, effort, and productivity" (1967). Discussing the Kennedy tax cuts of 1962, he even provided his own version of the Laffer Curve: "To the extent that a tax cut succeeds in stimulating business, our . . . tax system will collect extra revenues out of the higher income levels. Hence, a tax cut may in the long run imply little (or even no) loss in federal revenues, and hence no substantial increase in the long-run public debt."

This passage was relegated to a chapter appendix in Samuelson's 1967 edition, demonstrating that the principles of supply-side economics have long been standard knowledge among economists, but were simply given little emphasis in textbooks.

Samuelson likewise devoted little attention to monetary policy, regarding it as "at best a supplement to . . . fiscal policy" (1955). Changes in the money supply, he argued, have only weak influences on interest rates and investment spending, and "in practice monetary policy may not have such strong effects on income" (1955). Samuelson's early editions totally dismissed the quantity theory of money.

Unemployment, not inflation, was the chief concern of Samuelson's text and others of the day, and little effort was made to develop links between money and prices. This perhaps explains why Samuelson and others were so optimistic about deficit spending. If monetary policy was impotent, monetization of the debt was not likely to be inflationary.

The Sleeping Giants of Free-Market Economics

During the Keynesian Camelot of the early 1960s, there emerged the first free-market alternative to the interventionist bias found in Samuelson's text. *University Economics: Elements of Inquiry,* by Armen Alchian and William Allen, first appeared in 1964 and is now in its third edition. The Alchian-Allen text never came close to Samuelson's in sales figures, but its influence is possibly as great because it helped to form the thinking of the current generation of free-market textbook writers who *have* captured a large share of the market. Alchian and Allen's text was treasured by many free-market economists; but since parts of it were too advanced for introductory students it was not widely adopted. Thus, for a time there was no free-market text that was as well done as Alchian and Allen's and also accessible to a wide audience. The new free-market texts fill this gap.

In contrast to Samuelson, Alchian and Allen endeavored to explain how real-world markets actually operate rather than merely to evaluate markets by the theoretical model of perfect competition. To point out that markets are not perfect, they wrote, "is to say nothing useful, since everything we do reflects a lack of perfect knowledge." Instead, they sought to explain how markets deal with problems of imperfect information, transaction costs, and attenuated property rights. This led to a more favorable view of markets since markets deal with such problems better than any alternative institutions.

An example of Alchian's and Allen's real-world analysis is their discussion of advertising. In perfect competition there is no need for advertising because "everybody knows everything." This is why advertising has long been suspected by many economists as a means of monopolization

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that should be restricted by government control. But Alchian and Allen taught that in a world of imperfect information, advertising often serves the useful purpose of facilitating comparison shopping, thereby strengthening competitive pressures. "Imagine trying to shop in a community with no signs proclaiming one's business, with no directories of locations of firms, and with no idea where sellers are located." In fact, it is legislative bans on advertising—usually lobbied for by well-established firms not wanting to compete with newcomers—that are monopolizing.

Alchian and Allen similarly stressed the importance of middlemen, wholesalers, retailers, warehousers, salespeople, and other marketing and finance specialists. These people have one thing in common: they specialize in providing consumers with information which helps reduce the costs of exchange. For example, a real estate agent earns his or her fee by becoming an expert on housing prices and characteristics and the preferences of housing consumers. They save their clients time and money in return for their fee. The absence of "perfect information" about such matters is not evidence of "market failure" but a reason why middlemen serve a useful purpose.

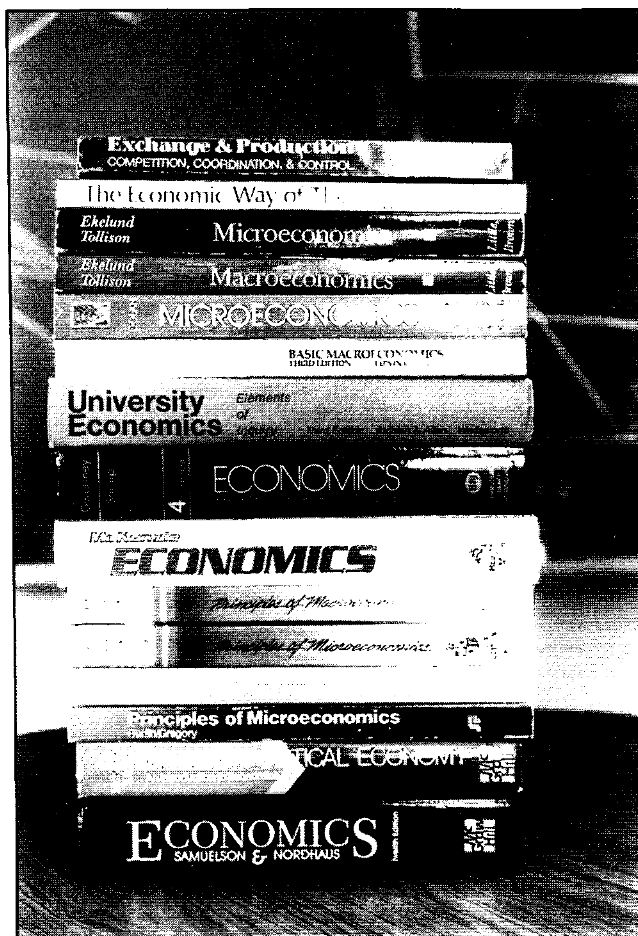
A third example of the Alchian-Allen market approach is its analysis of the separation of ownership from control in corporations, which sometimes causes the interests of management to diverge from those of stockholders. Samuelson saw this as yet another market failure that should and could be corrected by government regulation. Alchian and Allen, by contrast, emphasized the strengths of the market for corporate control, the use of takeovers and mergers to place checks on managerial behavior. It may be costly for shareholders to police the behavior of managers, but "The . . . shareholder . . . has a saleable right in the [firm's] capital value. . . . The relatively lower price of shares of inefficiently managed corporations serves as an inducement to replace the current managers with more efficient ones."

Alchian and Allen strongly emphasized another subject ignored by Samuelson—the role of property rights in the economy:

> If property rights in goods are weak, ill defined, or vague, the reallocation of goods [through market exchange] is likely to be guided by "biased" exchange offers and bids. . . . Who would offer as much for a coat, if he thought it was very likely to be stolen from him?

Market inefficiencies, Alchian and Allen argued, are often not a matter of market failure, but legal failure—the failure to enforce private property rights. Examples of such failures and the importance of well-enforced property rights in rectifying them are numerous: Commonly owned salmon fisheries are overfished, but not private salmon streams; people litter in public parks but not in their own yards; homeowners take better care of their property than renters or the occupants of public housing; national forests are carelessly logged and overharvested.

Alchian and Allen also analyzed how governments actually allocate resources, as opposed to how they ideally "should" make decisions. They thus taught a more realistic



Samuelson is struggling just to remain in the top ten.

view of government intervention than did Samuelson. They elaborated on the many instances of government-sanctioned or -created monopoly. They taught that "competition . . . is not unique to the free-enterprise, private property system. [It] exists in every social system . . . [and] is the result of scarcity. . . . It is the result of conflicts of interest imposed by the physical world and by the nature of man." The recognition of this fact had important public policy implications. It was no longer sufficient to point to "market failure" in calling for government intervention in the economy; one had to raise questions as well about how government went about making decisions. In many cases, Alchian and Allen taught, government allocation decisions would be determined by political power rather than by the "public interest."

The Seattle Slew

Much of the extraordinary influence of the Alchian-Allen textbook is due to its adoption by a group of economics professors at the University of Washington in Seattle. During the late 1960s and 1970s, Professors Douglass C. North, Yoram Barzel, Steven Cheung, Robert Higgs, Roger LeRoy Miller, Paul Heyne, and others required their doctoral students to master Alchian and Allen before advancing to comprehensive exams. Many of these students and professors went on to write successful textbooks in

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the Alchian-Allen vein. James Gwartney and Richard Stroup are both Washington graduates; their text, *Economics: Private and Public Choice,* is among the most widely used. Roger Miller has written over 30 textbooks on subjects ranging from money and banking to economic history. Paul Heyne patterned *The Economic Way of Thinking* directly after Alchian's and Allen's approach. North and Miller published *The Economics of Public Issues* in 1972. This introductory "supplementary text" has sold over 600,000 copies and spawned an entire industry composed of similar products such as *The New World of Economics* by Richard McKenzie and Gordon Tullock, and *The Economics of Public Policy* by Edwin Dolan and John Goodman.

The spread of free-market ideas into college classrooms is the sign of a rightward shift among mainstream economists.

The newly dominant free-market texts follow the Alchian-Allen lead in resisting the call for government intervention in the face of alleged market "imperfections." Gwartney and Stroup, for example, stress the importance of property rights, teaching that private owners have more incentives to conserve for the future, and that with property rights, a negligent owner can be held accountable for damage to others through misuse of property. They describe externality problems as the result of ill-defined and poorly enforced property rights, not as market failure.

In *Economics,* Robert Ekelund and Robert Tollison inform students of both the perfect competition model and the "new view" that "competition is not to be described by a given number of sellers and buyers but rather by a rivalry for profits.... One or two sellers in an industry can be competitive as long as entry and exit in the market are possible." All the new free-market texts refer to this "new learning," much of which has been applied to the many changes in federal antitrust policy in recent years.

Ekelund and Tollison show how corporate takeovers discipline corporate management, and how an absence of ownership rights makes government enterprises less efficient than private businesses. They emphasize the informational value of advertising as opposed to its allegedly monopolizing value, and they argue that product innovation and research and development can enhance welfare even if they grant businesses temporary monopolies. Like most of the free-market textbooks, they argue that monopoly is very difficult to achieve in the free enterprise system without government-sanctioned entry barriers.

The Public Choice Revolution

In contrast to the texts of 15 years ago, the new free-market texts draw substantially on the subdiscipline of public choice. This approach, in the words of Milton Friedman, treats "the political system symmetrically with the economic system. Both are regarded as markets in which the outcome is determined by the interaction among persons pursuing their own self-interests ... rather than by the social goals the participants find it advantageous to enunciate." Gwartney and Stroup devote an entire chapter and parts of others to the discussion of government failure. They explain the "rational ignorance" of voters, the power of special interests, the short sightedness of political decision-making with its focus on the next election, the lack of incentives for economic efficiency, the role of logrolling in encouraging the overexpansion of government spending, the political proclivity for deficit spending, and the imprecision in the reflection of consumer preferences that is inherent in the political process.

Students are now exposed to the idea that the roots of monopoly are more likely to be found in the legislature than in abstract ideas of "imperfect competition." The new textbook writers provide example after example of *government-sanctioned* monopoly, with government regulation of industry often resulting from a demand *by the industry* for protection from competition.

Generally reflecting the state of knowledge in economics, the new free-market texts are much less optimistic about the efficacy of countercyclical fiscal policy. One weakness of such fine-tuning that is emphasized is the time lag in government decision-making. Writes Richard McKenzie: "If a fiscal stimulus is passed late in the recovery phase of a recession, it can add to the inflationary pressures that accompany the approach to the peak of a business cycle."

Ekelund and Tollison argue that fiscal policy frequently reflects politicians' interests rather than stabilizing macroeconomic objectives:

> In an attempt to enhance their reelection prospects, incumbent politicians promote expansionary policies prior to election day—tax cuts, increased government spending, and greater money supply growth. These policies have politically popular consequences in the short run: lower unemployment and interest rates along with increased real income.... Immediately after the election, the politicians reverse course. To limit the higher inflation rates that the preelection strategy fosters, they raise taxes and cut spending, and money supply growth is reduced. The result... is a business cycle whose length is roughly equal to the interval between elections.

The Role of Price Expectations

Some of the new-generation textbooks go even further in arguing against countercyclical fiscal policy. They incorporate theories of adaptive and rational expectations, which teach that activist fiscal (or monetary) policy has no *long-run* effect on the economy other than fueling inflation.

Gwartney and Stroup define the adaptive expectations hypothesis as the assumption that "economic decision-makers base their future expectations on actual outcomes observed during recent periods." This sounds like common sense, but it is a major departure from the past, when

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macroeconomists assumed that during periods of expansionary fiscal policy, workers blinded by "money illusion" would be willing to work indefinitely for lower real wages. The adaptive expectations hypothesis suggests that individuals will eventually recognize the true inflation rate and incorporate it into their wage expectations.

The rational expectations hypothesis suggests that expansionary fiscal or monetary policy cannot stimulate output and employment even in the short term. As described by Ekelund and Tollison, this hypothesis assumes that "After a time, individuals begin to understand the workings of the economy. For example, they will learn . . . that increases in monetary expansion . . . [are] followed by inflation, which is followed by higher nominal interest rates. Knowing the basic structure of the . . . economy, individuals will be able to anticipate the most likely outcomes." If this premise is correct, expansionary policies can be effective only if they catch people by surprise. Write Gwartney and Stroup: "The policy implications of rational expectations are clear. . . . Policy should not attempt to fine-tune the economy. Efforts to do so will only contribute to economic uncertainty."

Siding with Supply

Supply-side economics is standard fare in the new free-market texts, which teach that lower marginal tax rates can stimulate work effort, encourage investment in education and training, encourage business investment by increasing the after-tax returns on investment, stimulate saving, and reduce tax evasion. Ekelund and Tollison write that "policies to remove impediments to work, save, and invest have gained fairly broad approval among economists." In contrast with fiscal fine-tuning, write Gwartney and Stroup, "supply-side economics is a long-run strategy, not a countercyclical tool or a quick fix."

The new textbook writers also use supply-side economics to shed light on the apparent ineffectiveness of fiscal policies aimed at redistributing income. The Samuelson generation assumed that income-transfer programs were helping most of the poor simply because that was the announced intention. By contrast, textbook writers such as Gwartney and Stroup stress that because of very high marginal tax rates imposed on the poor, as well as other disincentives, the transfer programs "severely penalized self-improvement efforts of low-income Americans."

The new texts express a concern over the effects of deficits on capital accumulation and economic growth. Edwin Dolan informs students of the Keynesian theory that deficits do not matter because "we owe it to ourselves" but also points to the dangers of deficits: the rising tax burden required to pay off the interest on the public debt, and the risk that "at some point, government borrowing may begin to crowd out the private investment on which future economic growth depends." The new texts also teach the public choice lesson that deficits are a means of winning votes and therefore can be expected to persist regardless of the state of the economy.

In contrast to Samuelson's early editions, the new textbooks stress the central importance of monetary policy. Monetary policy is no longer just a supplement to fiscal policy. Changes in the money supply have been shown to have important and systematic effects on prices, output, and general economic performance. The new texts argue that periods of monetary acceleration have been associated with rapid growth of real GNP (and vice versa), that rapid growth of the money supply is linked to inflation and higher interest rates, and that a major cause of the Great Depression was the 27 percent reduction in the money supply between 1929 and 1933. Even Samuelson has come around on monetarism, writing in his 12th edition (with William Nordhaus): "In the early editions of the book, fiscal policy was top banana. In later editions that emphasis changed to equality. In this edition we've taken a stand that monetary policy is most important."

What Makes Samuelson Run?

Monetary policy is not the only area of economics where Samuelson has changed his tune. His 12th edition now warns students that "we must be alert to *government failure*—situations in which governments cause diseases or make them worse" [emphasis in the original], and also devotes an entire section to public choice theory. Samuelson and Nordhaus step back from their complete endorsement of Keynesianism in earlier editions by admitting that "early Keynesianism has benefited from the rediscovery of money. . . . In their early enthusiasm about the role of fiscal policy, many Keynesians unjustifiably downgraded the role of money." Also, Keynesians are faulted for being "too confident about the predictability of the economy," for a "naive faith in steering the economy into an Eden of economic tranquility," and for being "nonchalant about inflation."

Deficit spending is not defended as arduously as it once was. There is even a discussion of the role of property rights in the context of "the tragedy of the commons," and a recognition that the economic side-effects of government income-transfer programs may be harmful. "Our current welfare system . . . contains major disincentives for the poor. . . . Some believe that this disincentive is so powerful that it creates a cycle of poverty and dependence." Like other contemporary texts, Samuelson's 12th edition offers extended discussions of supply-side economics, rational expectations, political business cycles, and the problem of time lags in the implementation of fiscal and monetary policy. The book still has a strong interventionist tone, but as these examples reveal, it has been softened.

The choice of textbooks by academic economists is a good barometer of current economic thinking. The spread of free-market ideas into college classrooms—and even into Samuelson's textbook—may therefore be seen as a sign of a rightward shift among mainstream economists. The new generation of textbooks will also have a strong effect on popular thinking about economics in the coming generation. Today's students are learning to reject Keynes and much of the interventionism of the 1950s and 1960s, but they may well confirm Keynes' pronouncement that "in the field of economic and political philosophy there are not many who are influenced by new theories after they are 25 or 30 years of age."

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Good News For The Fetus

Two Fallacies in the Abortion Debate

Ian Gentles

Many people who favor abortion base their logic on two false premises. The first is that women who want abortions will get them anyway—no law has ever stopped a woman from getting an abortion. The second, which derives from the first, is that since abortion is inevitable, it is better that women have their abortions in safe and legal hospital facilities; otherwise they will have to turn to back-alley abortions, resulting in medical problems and high death rates for mothers. Although both these propositions seem intuitively correct, evidence has accumulated since the legalization of abortion in the United States and abroad which proves them wrong. There may be a case for permitting abortion, but it cannot be based on these two claims any longer.

Let us start with the second claim—that prior to legalization of abortion, women risked horrible medical hazards which often took their lives as well as those of their fetuses. If this were true, then an argument can be made that it is better to permit women to terminate their pregnancies legally; at least the mothers' lives can be saved.

But what are the actual figures on maternal deaths from illegal abortions? Whenever one is dealing with an illegal practice, statistics are understandably difficult to come by. Nevertheless, it is relatively easier to count maternal deaths from illegal abortion than it is to count illegal abortions. That is because the body of a fetus is easily disposed of, while it is not so easy to get rid of the corpse of a full-grown woman. There are obviously many people who would like to keep illegal abortion deaths secret—the abortionist, the victim's family, and the father of the fetus, for example. Yet it is extremely difficult to persuade a doctor (who is most likely not the same doctor who performed the abortion) to fake or lie about the cause of death on a death certificate. Based on this belief, the figures on maternal deaths from illegal abortion, which show a fairly consistent pattern over a number of years, and in a number of industrialized countries, are considered to be reasonably accurate.

Figure 1 shows the number of maternal deaths from illegal abortion for Britain, Canada and the United States. Sources for this data are *Vital Statistics of the United States,* published by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare; *Causes of Death, Canada,* published by Statistics Canada; and *Statistical Review for England and Wales,* a set of tables published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office in London.

Immediately one sees that the annual number of deaths from illegal abortion for all three countries has been, since 1940, quite small. In Canada, for instance, it was less than 50; in the United States, less than 350. Even if these numbers considerably understate maternal deaths from abortion, we are still dealing with a number that pales in contrast to the image of "thousands, if not hundreds of thousands" of women dying from abortion which has been cultivated in the public imagination by the pro-choice movement.

Fewer Deaths

A second fact emerges from Figure 1 which is even more notable. The number of deaths from illegal abortion for all three countries shows a sharp, almost uninterrupted decline. This decline began almost 30 years before legalization and continues right to the point of legalization. Furthermore, shortly prior to legalization, the actual number of women dying each year from illegal abortions is negligible: 20-25 in the United States, less than five in Britain and in Canada. Again, we can assume some unreported deaths, but even so we cannot avoid the conclusion that abortion mortality had fallen to a very low figure. Whatever the rate at which we assume that the statistics understate the facts, there is no reason to assume that the bias toward underreporting maternal deaths from abortion should change from year to year. Thus, we cannot deny the *pattern* for Britain, Canada and the United States over the years.

Why did abortion deaths decline? A variety of forces were at work, but the leading factor was undoubtedly the discovery of sulfonamides, penicillin, and other antibiotics, whose use became widespread during the 1940s and 1950s. Antibiotics have been the greatest single factor in reducing infection-related mortality during the past 40 years, and therefore must also have contributed to the steep decline in abortion deaths before legalization. Hospitals were now

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