

Book Review

Green economics: an introduction to theory, policy and practice

Molly Scott Cato

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Do you want to be liked? Do you want to be popular? Are you a little tired of students evaluating your courses in economic geography, spatial econometrics or most other kinds of human geography, and all of economics as, by implication, a little boring, not quite at the cutting edge, not as good as what the new young—popular—lecturers are doing? Do you retort ‘what do they know?’ but in your heart of hearts are coming to think that perhaps your lectures are getting a little jaded on ‘location allocation models’, ‘regional convergence’ or even ‘thick institutions’ (and I do not mean the stupid kind). Are you becoming a little sick of telling students that it’s all very complicated and everything needs to be deconstructed? In your heart of hearts (again) do not you hanker after being able to tell them something that is a little less self-defeating? You might just be worried about your job now that university funding in all the countries where geography is taught is about to go negative. You might no longer care, but you know you need to become a little more popular. Alternatively you may be ever so principled, take your teaching ever so seriously, not concern yourself with student surveys but still be interested in trying to teach the students right, no matter how complicated the story. But, almost no matter what your motive is—if you have read down this far—this book is for you.

‘Green Economics’ by Molly Scott Cato is not a book about environmentalism, it is not about advocating fair trade, it is not about being a little nicer, a more corporately responsible person, offsetting your holidays and recycling your leftovers. *Green Economics* is about why what most people who study economics believe about economics appears so very wrong when simply looked at as if people and the planet mattered. *Green Economics* asks what the theories are which explain this, what new policies they then suggest and how, in practice, green policies ensure a sustainable future is possible (these are not environment policies). It is a serious book written by the grown-up version of the kinds of people who are currently invading airports, chaining themselves to those coal trucks on the way to power stations and populating climate camps.

Molly Scott Cato is Economics Speaker for the Green Party, Reader in Green Economics at the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, mother and self-styled ‘ideas merchant’. So I will agree that she does not have that much in common with many of the men of what was once called new economic geography, but she does have great faith in geography as one launch-pad for a wider green economics. Her last book ‘Market Schmarket’ gives an idea of how directly she writes from its title alone (in it she questioned some of the most fundamental assumptions of our modern market economy). This new book covers similar territory, but written as a textbook rather than a polemic. Still, it would not be to everyone’s taste, but your students will like it much more than most books they are asked to read; even if you do not. And remember, as part-time work dries up, they will only be able to afford one textbook next year. And they will probably want one which gives them some answers as to why everything economically appears to have gone wrong.

The remit for writing reviews for this journal requires that the reviewer writes to the economic audience as well as geographers. It is those trained in economics who have most to gain from the publication of

'Green Economics'. It may be common knowledge amongst economists now, but when I was taught the subject at school no one explained to me that the origin of the calculation used to construct GDP 'was to measure the war-fighting capacity of a nation' (p. 114). It is the reporting and careful collection and referencing of many examples such as this which finally helped me answer a question that I had been puzzling over for a couple of decades: why economists did something that looked so pointless as measure GDP and carried on doing it and believing in it. Similarly learning how economic growth as traditionally measured has been used as a substitute for equality has also helped me at least understand the continued obsession with GDP change (p. 173). That obsession is highest amongst economists near policy making. I have had to draw a lot of maps for them of these things, which they approximate from incomes and wages, and I was increasingly finding it hard to understand why they thought GDP related to productivity. Now I understand its purpose is not about promoting real productivity at all, but about making people not worry that they are unequal and ensure we are in a state to undertake war.

The book is clearly written from what is becoming an ever expanding heterodox side to the subject of economics. Its sources and list of further resources include links to the postautistic economics network (<http://www.paecon.net/>, by-line: 'sanity, humanity and science'). *Green economics* is divided into three parts. The subtitle gives a clue as to how that is done. It ends with a 13th chapter of summary clearly written to aid the book's reviewers (green economists are ever so thoughtful). Its chapters concern: (1) the origins of the green economics movement which the author claims is the first significant alternative to communism and capitalism; (2) its great theorists; (3) what you value when you value sustainability; (4) why only some work is good work; (5) money and what can be done about it; (6) green business; (7) why green policy is not environmentalism; (8) globalization and reducing trade where possible; (9) re-localizing; (10) green taxation; (11) green welfare; (12) land and food.

Finally, we come to the part where the reviewer usually criticizes something about the book they are reading. It would be wrong to break such a long tradition so here are my whines: The list of the great and good in the history of green economics was a little long for my liking (Chapter 2) and I am sure that a slightly wider group than these mostly posh white men could have been included, adding, for instance, Marilyn Waring, the New Zealand feminist economist who made the comments about GDP and war. She might not quite fit the mould of left/green radical. She was the member of the right-wing government in power in New Zealand in the early 1980s, and her insubordination predicated the election of 1984 that resulted in the 'Chicago boys' getting their hands on the New Zealand economy that year (having tired of Chile). There are better known ecofeminists than Marilyn, and many others from various shades of deep green that could be included in a both shorter and more heterogeneous history.

Any other gripes? Well I do not like some of the tables that list things as words-pairs: Patriarchal economies (a) value: Markets/Wealth/Intellect, etc.; (b) do not value: Subsistence/Reciprocity/Body (a summary of part of Table 3.3). I am not sure why I do not like them, and I very much suspect students would like them a lot. They make very good exam cribs sheets. And, as this review began by asking you whether you wanted to be popular with your students, I can hardly complain that strongly about simplifying arguments with crib-like tables too much.

I am an old lefty. I have a car. I do not recycle (much), I am not that into 'the body', I usually fail at reciprocity (over whose pint it is) and could hardly claim any idea about how to start to be subsistent, but I was convinced by many if not most of the arguments being put forward in this textbook. I found it clearly and consistently enough written to read from beginning to end without getting bored and I thought, at the end, if I were to be asked to teach a course on economic geography, then this is what I would turn to. For balance I might have to pair it with Robert H. Frank's 'The Economic Naturalist: Why Economics Explains Almost

Everything'. Robert's is an awful book that is the very antithesis of 'Green Economics'. The economic naturalist includes some choice social-Darwinist suggestions, such as that women are attracted to people like (implied male) neo-classical economists because of the size of the men's enormous intellects. It would be great to teach a course contrasting the two approaches to economics, but hard to justify students spending their

money on Robert's suggestions. Thinking about it, someone should write the even easier to read 'The Green Economist: Why Green Economics Explains Almost Everything Much Better'. But until that day; buy this book.

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