Time and conflict in economic models: critical epistemology on recent developments.

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Abstract

The present article deals with the exclusion of the notion of conflict from most of modern economic theory, and the resulting difficulty to introduce historical time and social change within theoretical language. Our analysis will rely on a review of some formal models, starting with standard General Equilibrium; we will then conduct a critical survey of the introduction of intertemporal analysis within the scope of modern economic theory. We will try to show the systematic smoothing and exclusion of potential social conflicts and the role played by temporal (sequential, asymptotic) dynamic in this undermining. Then, we will provide an interpretation of the political significance of this absence, this exclusion; relying on the epistemological work of Michel Foucault. Finally, the aim will be to initiate a reintroduction of a discourse of conflict through the work carried by Pierre Bourdieu on the economic field.
‘The element of Time is...the centre of the chief difficulty of almost every economic problems’ A. Marshall

‘Epistemology is often viewed as a sort of meta-discourse, transcendental to scientific practice; according to me, it is a reflection that actually changes our practice, and saves us from a number of mistakes’ P. Bourdieu

INTRODUCTION

The question of time in economic models is a central and yet largely overlooked issue. Classical epistemology chiefly concluded in the impossibility, the exclusion and absence of time in economic models, specifically in neoclassical theory (Mouchot 1978). Successively displayed as a “black hole” (Sapir 2001) by non mainstream critiques or irreducible dichotomy between model sciences and historical/narrative sciences by other social sciences; the question of formalism of temporality needs to be tackled with all the more so in this time of crisis for economic theory. It appears as a necessity both from a point of view of a sounder epistemology which needs to account more precisely for the differential formalizations of time in economic models, and to set the basis for a positive rebuilding of economics as an historical science. We wish here to connect the epistemology of time with the nature of social interactions depicted by certain sections of neoclassical theory. Our hypothesis is that the impossibility primarily resides in the systematic exclusion of conflict and violence of the theoretical discourse, in which time play a systematic role of social and historical pacification.
CONFLICT

We will resort here to a broad definition of conflict, as direct social interactions which are not completely mediated by commodities, goods or prices and imply some form of objective social antagonism (power, domination, exploitation, differentiation). Marx was the first to underline the central role of conflict in social change, yet this definition is not entirely negative: Georg Simmel pointed at the socializing function of conflict, and its core role in the historical evolution of social order. However, it was Pierre Bourdieu who provided the most in-depth analysis of the link between conflict and time, through his theory field dynamics; we will come back to that.

TIME

Regarding the philosophical concept of time, there are in fact two a priori independent issues that need to be tackled with separately. The question of social temporalities -the way individuals move about in different temporal constraints (work, leisure, national celebrations, loans and credit, etc.), and how these heterogeneous dimensions evolved historically- is essential and different social sciences (sociology, history, anthropology) provide insightful analyses: be it only the seminal works by Norbert Elias, Pierre Bourdieu (1977), Marshall Sahlins (1972) or E.P.Thompson (1967). However, we will look into a much more epistemological question, which regards the (re)introduction of historical dynamic within the proper scope of economic theory. This dichotomy overlaps with the traditional separation between objective and subjective time, on which we will not rely here. Therefore, the following work has a much more political than anthropological ambition. We wish to bridge some internal epistemological criticisms with broader theoretical issues. The question of realism remains central but will not constitute our primary criteria of analysis. Our aim is
primarily to look into potential wedges, spaces, within the body of the theory for a discourse on temporality and history to emerge.

We will clarify our argument along three axes. Our point will be first to review some canonical models to analyze the systematic impossibility to introduce conflict, and the role temporality plays in this exclusion. We will first come back to the Arrow-Debreu, general equilibrium (GE) model. We will then survey the differential treatment of time in two major post-walrasian features: game theory, in its dynamic version and dynamic programming – with a particular emphasis on Overlapping Generations Models, and the role of intertemporal analysis in the atrophy of any form of actual social interactions.

In a second section, we will try to endorse a broader apprehension of the above mentioned models. According to us, all these conceptualizations, in spite of their essential differences, can be traced back to a similar equivalence class, which will be defined as “eschatological answers” to the question of temporality. A credible alternative must break off with this vision of the present as an asymptotically pacified situation in which the future is always conceived as a project, a path towards a stationary, stable situation which neutralizes, disconnects, detemporalizes today’s choices, evacuating the intrinsic conflict of the synchronic economy. We will try to apply a Foucauldian analysis of the social and political function of the place of conflict within the discourse of economic theory, how can we interpret its absence, or comparatively it’s very sporadic and yet significant appearances.

Finally we will rapidly try to shed light on the work of Pierre Bourdieu on the economic field, who tried to capture the way the evolution of the economy produces the conditions of its
own reproduction, through an objective inscription in subjective expectations of the
structure of power relations of the social order; thus enabling to understand social change
and break with the vision of its conflict dimension as an anathema. This paper represents a
call for further research, at the crossroad of political epistemology and a quest for
alternative formal theory.

SECTION 1: A critical review

GE Models

We will first rapidly overlook issues relating to the Arrow Debreu world; the critical literature
on first generation GE models is affluent and our aim will only be to hint at a few
statements. In his Theory of Value (1959), Gerard Debreu deals with an abstract issue, chiefly
the allocation of scarce resources and corresponding optimality conditions. Therefore, if the
question of dynamics is ruled out by definition, it is chiefly out of pure mathematical
reasons; and the same statement could stand for the work of Leon Walras. However, the
question of effective or virtual temporality in Walras’s model in highly debated and requires
settling the issue of the status of money in the “tatônnement process” - see Bauvert (2007)
for a presentation of the competing interpretations of Bridel (2002) and Rebeyrol (1998). We
will not try to address this issue here, nevertheless we can already see that even in General
Equilibrium Models (GEM), temporality in the sense of the existence or inexistence of
historical dynamics is a complex issue. Moreover, it overlaps only partially with the question
of formalization; we will come back to this later on. However, a large part of “non-
mainstream” economists have tried to draw the line between purely formal, non-historical,
neoclassical approaches and what now seems to unite under the term ‘political economy’ on the question of the treatment of temporality; the example of Arrow-Debreu type models being overwhelmingly referred to as canonical. The recent book by Jacques Sapir (2001) exemplifies this type of approach. Our point is not to reject any sort of relevance to this dichotomy; we would like to show that both the assessment and the alternative enhanced by this type of approach do not deal with this issue on a comprehensive and satisfactory way. One particular problem regards the accusation of unrealism that is often directed at such type of models. If one takes a close look at Debreu’s work, it is far from an unconscious strategy; dynamics are located outside of his scope of research, and although later uses may have been much more instrumental, such criticisms do not seem to represent safe grounds upon which to build in order to go past such an axiomatic.

However, some elements relating to the nature of interactions between agents is of more central interest to us. In particular, the second welfare theorem, according to which any competitive equilibrium can be Pareto optimal provided that the ‘social planner’ can initially transfer endowments among agents can be interpreted as a way of pacifying any form of potential conflict between agents, provided that a benevolent theoretical meta-agent (whoever is made responsible of realizing initial transfers) is granted the possibility to ensure the balancing function of the relative price system through the reallocation of endowments. The abolition of historical time is neither the result of an anthropological nor normative enterprise that supposedly wishes to describe an ideal social situation towards which all market configurations should tend; nonetheless it stresses the existing connection between the theoretical imperative to display smooth, purged social relations and the exclusion of historical dynamic: the two dimensions are deeply intertwined.
Dynamic Game Theory

The second class of models that we will review is microeconomic and lean upon dynamic game theory. We will limit ourselves to the complete information set of models, the question of information processes being only indirectly related to the issue at hand. One can refer to Gibbons’s textbook (1992) for a complete formal presentation. The basic problem on which these model focus is the usual interaction between two face-to-face economic agents (individual, firms, countries, etc.), they choose over a set of possible strategies (with corresponding payoffs) in a specific order (i.e. one of them has ‘first move’ advantage). The game must usually be represented by a ‘tree’ to be solved, and one should make no mistake as to the significance of this kind of device. Behind this simple, convenient representation of social choices lies an essentially play aspect that should not be neglected. Indeed, this apparently salient paradox between the extremely formal and abstract status of such models and the simplified apparatus resorted to (tables, trees, etc.) gives its full meaning to the use of the term ‘game’. In fact, if we follow Huizinga’s analysis (2003) of play as a fundamental characteristic of human culture, the cohabitation of pure scientific display and simple reproducible play no longer appears as paradoxical; provided that one can master the dominant schemes of abstract reasoning, elementary resolution becomes accessible in a friendly handshake between the ‘homo faber’ and the ‘homo ludens’, who are usually antagonized. The definition of the former concept was given by Hannah Arendt (1998), when she referred to the capacity of men to build stable institutions and abstract structures (science, law, etc.) within which social life can unfold; and to the activity of ‘work’ corresponding to a social, rather than biological necessity. The economist as a scientist is at
some point granted the privilege of combining both, as Huizinga (2003) nicely puts it: "Let my playing be my learning and my learning be my playing."

This set aside, the methodological principle of ‘backward induction’ is of particular interest for our analysis of temporal processes. The approach is sequential and consists in solving optimal value at each “nod” of the game, and hence coming back to the initial period; this step-by-step procedure defining the optimal strategy. Even though there is some sort of interaction between players, they are only mediated by the respective sequential choices on a particular economic outcome. This abstract situation of a face-to-face analysis reduced to utility maximization can be interpreted differently.

First, it provides a good example of “scholastic illusion" in the words of Pierre Bourdieu (2000): this abstract situation has no relevancy whatsoever to account for effective interactions between individuals; it represents a simple additional formal device. Bourdieu originally oriented his criticism at a specific sociological tradition which he refers to as ‘ethnomethodologism’ (Alfred Schütz), a particular branch of symbolic interactionism, yet the two type of reasoning can be shown to have a lot of similarities. They indeed resort to an equivalent starting point (see GH Mead for a good representation) where two individuals are face-to-face and their interactions determine the “social construction of reality” (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Social relationships and the objective hierarchic, differentiation, domination or power relationships are voluntarily set aside. This conceptual apparatus requires an abstract return to this original, a-structural situation, in which the individual has a ‘natural attitude’ (Schütz) towards the other, where communication and mutual understanding are ensured and the existence of a definite structure of interaction can only be assumed. According to Bourdieu, this mode of reasoning ‘tacitly’ imposes the ‘inert
violence’ of social order, objective social relationships become both invisible and unutterable in theoretical language (see *Pascalian Meditations*, p 251). Reciprocally, setting up this type of theoretical device is also a way to talk about social interactions in a pacific way, to exclude any form of conflict and violence from the body to the theory. More could obviously be said to underline the familiarities between game theory and a particular sociological or philosophical tradition, and this connection would probably need to be qualified. However, resorting to Bourdieu’s analysis on this matter seemed relevant for our argument.

Second, this type of theoretical framework represents a good example of reification, not in the historical sense given by Georg Lukacs (1972), but within the proper scope of the theory: the relations between individuals are limited to objectified relations, not necessarily through a market structure and corresponding commodities, but through any variable of pecuniary interest to the agents. What matters is the strategic choice over a finite set of variables, and interactions are determined by the allocation of payoffs. In particular, no objective social relationship (hierarchy, domination, power relationship) can be introduced apart from the resulting payoffs and the model parameters (form of utility functions, time preference, etc.): the canonical example of a game between a worker and his employer is highly representative. The worker must minimize his effort while providing a sufficient amount of work for employer to preserve his contract (not “shirk” too much), and the latter must on the other hand maximize the efforts of his workforce while minimizing his cost of surveillance. The social hierarchy between the two agents is limited to the respective leverage on each others’ payoff (respectively profit and wage), and potential social conflict is simultaneously objectified in individual strategies and systematically smothered. Thus the
mediation operated by decentralized interactions (here through reciprocal impacts on expected payoffs) shows the link between reification and this undermining of potential conflict.

Last, even if the choices are made sequentially, the decision pattern is always fully determined (and this is also valid for the probabilistic case of incomplete information games) at the starting point, and there is no reason for any deviation from the optimal path. In particular, game theory has had some issues introducing evolution in the ‘rules of the game’, both in the external rules (constraints, sequential order, etc.) and the internal choice mechanisms (preferences, variables of interest, etc.). Time in these models is still perfectly reversible. We will not discuss ‘evolutionary’ microeconomics (cf. Walliser and Orléan 2006), as this would take us too far away from our initial objective of critical survey.

**OLG Models**

Let us now give another example, taken from macroeconomics, of models whose initial setup was supposed to include temporal processes. We chose OLG models for historical reasons, because their introduction was often presented as a way to deal with intertemporal dynamics in growth models. We will show how they remain unsatisfactory, and not only from the point of view of the introduction of irreversible time.

Our analysis of OLG models will lean on the first category of models initially developed by Samuelson and Diamond (one can refer to Daron Acemoglu’s textbook, chapter 9, for a full presentation of these models). This class of models was introduced in the neoclassical theory to overcome several limits of the first generation macroeconomic models know as Ramsey Koopmans. The economy is characterized by the simultaneous existence of several
generations, each generation living two periods, earning money, consuming and saving in the first and consuming its savings during the second period.

This additional hypothesis is supposed to have several ‘interesting’ implications. First, the economy is no longer characterized by a single representative household but by an infinite number of representative generations and their interactions are said to introduce some sort of tractable history, especially through saving mechanisms. Finally it was said to make room for a legitimate introduction of issues relating to Social Security and its implementation. We will focus here on the case of discrete time, but the same analysis could be undertaken in continuous OLG models (cf. Blanchard). The model is solved through usual dynamic programming in discrete time (Bellman equations, thus perfectly reversible techniques), and there we can show that there exists a steady state capital-labor ratio under the classical conditions. Then further restrictions are introduced on both the utility and the production functions (CRRA and Cobb-Douglas) leading to the unicity of this equilibrium value. Finally, if we assume log-preferences for households, then the economy will monotonically converge to the steady-state value.

André Orléan (2009) has clearly highlighted one “shadow” hypothesis that is usually not mentioned, the fact that each generation must believe in the stability of the economy from one period to another. Indeed, it is trivial to see that for a consumer to save wealth in the first period, and to consume in the second she must believe at some point in the durability of the reserve of value of its savings; for the interest rate to play its full trade-off role. One usual criticism that was made by Malinvaud is that the model doesn’t require any specific support for the reserve value; in particular money could easily be replaced by fiduciary
pension rights. In fact, as Orléan showed, this criticism is irrelevant; on the contrary it emphasizes the fundamentally institutional status of money, its stability being only ensured by the force of the underlying social convention that attributes to a specific financial commodity a certain form of credibility. However, the underlying assumption that the economy will reproduce itself infinitely is further emphasized by the latter debate; indeed, it shows that for the ‘historical motion’ to lead to the equilibrium, the conditions of choice in time must remain the same.

Hence, beyond this basic interpretation, we still see that the interactions between generations that was supposed to be introduced by OLG models in fact comes down to this elementary conclusion that all is well if the market and behavioral restrictions are ensured within the economy.

In particular, a social planner is usually introduced in canonical models -whose goal is supposed to maximize social wealth that is to achieve the Pareto Optimal level of capital-labor ratio. The competitive equilibrium is shown to be Pareto-optimal provided that the social planner has the leverage to force some generations to save more or less depending on the gap between the golden-rule (Pareto-optimal) and the competitive equilibria. He can in particular modify the capital accumulation to prevent from pecuniary externalities resulting from over accumulation, thus leading to dynamic efficiency. A particularly smooth way to achieve such an ideal is to introduce Social Security as a way to transfer wealth from one generation to the others to render the competitive equilibrium Pareto Optimal. The State is therefore unsurprisingly introduced (as a specific embodying of the social planner) to prevent any form of conflict between social groups (or generations, as each of them can be here characterized by a representative household), and to make sure that the economy will
asymptotically tend to a pacified steady state, where the best possible (or more precisely second-best) situation is achieved.

Moreover, although the question of intertemporal dynamics is introduced in OLG models, it is still limited to a ‘dynamic efficiency’ issue, the historical path of the economy is fully determined at the initial state. Indeed, the initial conditions and the immutable restrictions imposed on the markets (consumption and production), lead to a tractable path which can be (in the simplest version of the model) completely characterized from the starting point. Hence, even if the question of the evolution of a capitalist system can be discussed within the framework of OLG models, it is highly unsatisfactory, and any form of historical evolution is intrinsically excluded by the approach.

One could object that this type of model has been long forgotten and is not longer of any use to contemporary researchers; still it was useful for us to take a step back in the theory. Indeed, the core conclusion of the former analysis is to show that the question of the convergence of the economy (the introduction of dynamics in formal language) and the ability to introduce historical temporality within the scope of the theory are practically independent issues: OLG are dynamic models, yet the marginal interest of this form of dynamism is almost null from our perspective. This class of neoclassical models therefore remains unsatisfactory even though they introduce intertemporal evolutions. Critical epistemology, to be of any relevance must look beyond static GE models, and such a reviewed could be easily extended.
SECTION 2: Economic Eschatology

The notion of conflict in modern economic theory

We have reviewed some set of models who deal with the question of temporality in economic theory, yet we showed that they remained unsatisfactory from our point of view. The question of the reversibility of time is of course essential: if we want to set the basis for a possible representation of temporality in its historical dimension, we must completely break with this perspective. However, our problématique is slightly different in the sense that we wish to question the possibility to integrate the conflict dimension of present time.

This type of stance takes roots in the Marxist tradition, which tends to assimilate the historical dynamic with permanent class struggle. A different perspective was yet endorsed by Michel Foucault, especially in his lesson *Il faut défendre la société* (1997), in which he analyses the respective role of concepts of ‘war’ and ‘peace’ as power discourses. He raises the question of the relevance of the use of ‘war’ as a generative matrix for all differentiation, domination and power relationships, and in particular the emergence of modern political institutions. He shows how war as a heterogeneous concept was progressively excluded of influential abstract models as a way of understanding the evolution of societies. This is of double interest for us.

First, he weaves the history of the progressive professionalization of warrior institutions: the permanent, diffuse and omnipresent conflict that constituted earlier societies was pushed ‘at the boarders’ of nations with the emergence of modern State, and those functions became the prerogative of a certain class of warmongers and government institutions. Political philosophy followed this movement by setting up models in which the original state
of war was progressively pacified by the sovereign, e.g. the Hobbesian model of the
Leviathan, which Foucault characterized as a perfectly ‘non-war’ state. Therefore conflict
was simultaneously excluded from the majority of formal social analyses with the broad
adoption of an effective way of looking at, and of practicing, war. This complex dialectical
movement between social realities and abstract models –which is neither unilateral nor
univocal– is the second lesson that we wish to take from Foucault’s work.

At which point is it possible to further Foucault’s analysis of historical and philosophical
models that endorsed a pacified vision of social interactions, to modern economic theory is a
question that needs to be raised (for a full presentation of Foucault epistemological position,
see Archéologie du Savoir 1969). All models reviewed here indeed seem to smooth every
possible conflict interactions through the perfect determination of equilibrium path that
prevent any major historical upheavals. We can see that rather than pointing at the
impossibility of the economic theory to describe realistic economic situations, such a
position will lead us to look for the political function of the absence from the theoretical
discourse itself of elements such as war and conflict. Our assessments of OLG models
showed how diminished were relations between generations, and the role that the State
was supposed to play in this dynamic pacification.

Let us analyze more precisely the case of game theory as an example of the possibility of
such an extension of the Foucauldian perspective. Game theory, and its way of implementing
dynamic choices clearly underlines the proximity between ‘presentification’ (residing in the
way all future evolutions can be traced be to the present situation) and pacification.

It is significant from that point of view that canonical examples of game theory deal with a
situation of war between two countries and the choice to strike or to hold fire. The strategic
and military lexical field of game theory is far from metaphorical: Philip Mirowski pointed at the multiple linkages between the early specialists of game theory and the military industrial complex (see Machine Dreams 2002). It seems that after the second world war, economists managed to find their way in the professional body of warmongers early described by Foucault. The role of the RAND Corporation, and John Von Neuman in particular, whose early influence in the enhancement of game theory was crucial, must be connected to the role of strategic counseling that this institution had for the military administration in a Cold War context (see Poundstone 1992). War is indeed omnipresent in this section of this literature (‘war of attrition’, ‘bomb dilemma’, etc.), and yet all these models are used to induce deterrent effects, to ensure a swift and economical first-strike victory. The recent importation of game theory in political science (see Bueno de Mesquita 2006) seem to reinforce Foucault’s argument that a discourse of war can only take place if it is concerned within inter-national conflicts. This instrumentalization to reduce the risk of conflict, or limit economic consequences is highly significant; it cannot be viewed as a marginal, neutral application of scientific reasoning. We can therefore observe this simultaneous pregnancy of war as an area of application for game theory and the general anathema of any form of conflict social interactions, resulting in the impossibility for a systematic discourse on violence, domination or any form of social hierarchy to emerge within this section of the theory. The analysis of temporality is of prime interest from this point of view, as it stresses perfectly the drawbacks and limitations of a supposedly ‘neutral’ and ‘scientific’ analysis in terms of individual ‘strategies’, although such a perspective would require looking beyond usual dichotomies such static/dynamic, reversible/irreversible or mathematical/non mathematical.
We suggest the term ‘eschatological’ to characterize this enterprise of pacification through presentification, or the way the systematic search for an asymptotically, perfectly determined situation, is significant of a specific vision of social order. We will now try to justify this use. This religious concept refers to a projection into a ‘World to come’, a future relating to a stabilized, yet ever receding era, the never reached ‘end of times’. This prospective framework is not purely metaphysical as present actions can be deeply influenced by such a perspective. One may refer to Marx’s criticism of Hegelian philosophy for a complete critical perspective of such an approach, but there is no need for us to go into that much detail. It seems in fact quite trivial that beyond the convenient mathematical properties of intertemporal approach in economics (e.g. Hamiltonians in macroeconomics) lies a similar type of reasoning. For instance, the classical transversality condition in dynamic programming is only valid asymptotically, ensuring the equilibrium condition that all debts are paid off. One could object that as everything sparks off from the starting point of the economy, this elusive future is only of secondary interest to the economist. However, this also implies that individual life paths are evaluated according to this projection, and their sequential interactions come as substitutes to real social relationships, chronologically located. Agents, groups, and their respective strategies are independent from one another conditional on an immutable law of motion. Economic eschatology seem to imply a form of social pacification, where every source of potential conflict becomes prospective; and the current omnipresent discourse around the ‘war on poverty’, or any form of step-by-step collective effort of bettering the world directs away from our present historical condition any belligerent aspiration. This might be the core political stake of the rehabilitation of economics as an historical science, to understand the role of conflict in historical motion and thus rendering its effective modification accessible to economic agents.
SECTION 3: Conflict and economic change, a Bourdieusian perspective

The work of Pierre Bourdieu clearly embeds in this double perspective of analyzing the economy as a field of objective social relationships, and revealing its historical determination to the agents. His most contribution on the subject, “Le Champ économique” tries to formalize the extension of his canonical analysis (on culture, school, or the academic sphere), to the economic field, defined as a field of struggle. The latter is represented as a space of conflict between economic agents with different dispositions (habitus), who constantly interact with the social structure of objective relations, which they simultaneously contribute to forge. The use of a lexical field of combat is here again far from metaphorical, and here lies the major different between ‘struggle’ in a field and regular ‘competition’ on a market, where everything is decentralized through external variables (quantities and prices).

There is still a competition for valued resources in the economic field, but they are not limited to economic ones, and objective social relations are far more decisive than purely individual market characteristics (such as individual preferences or the attitude towards risk for consumers, or transformation functions for producers).

Temporality can therefore be determined by the aggregated functioning of the macrosocial fabric. Indeed, the economic field is said to be characterized by three elements, the volume of capital (in its different forms), its structure, and most importantly its temporal evolution. Violence, through social differentiation, is the core element of this historical motion, and conflict is thus integrated within the scope of theoretical economic discourse. The mediation orchestrated by the field is of a different nature for it is determined by the interactions and the agents’ respective social positions themselves. Moreover, intertemporal analysis isn’t
there to systematically curve social conflict; on the contrary, historical dynamic is endogenously produced by the interactions between individuals and the structure.

Our aim is not here to conclude on the true nature of time in social reality but rather to look for wedges within the theoretical discourse thanks to which the temporality of conflict can become utterable.

This work hasn’t sparked any applied research yet, except for Bourdieu’s inquire into the housing market (Les Structure Sociales de l’Economie 2002), and empirical work on economic entities (markets, firms, economic institutions) based on Bourdieusian field theory yet remains to be done.

**CONCLUSION**

This article aimed at analyzing some developments in modern economic theory from a critical and epistemological point of view. Our sentiment is that non mainstream economists have laid too much emphasis on a specific category of models, in particular early GE models studied by Arrow-Debreu; consequently, a lot of recent evolutions within the body on the theory remain unknown and therefore non criticized. We only tried to hint at potential interpretations of some intertemporal models, from the point of view of the relation between the impossibility to “talk” about endogenous social change and how conflict is a major anathema of modern theoretical field. We believed that tackling with the complicated issue of time represents a major stake in the rehabilitation of economics as an historical science. A similar critical analysis could in particular by carried on what has often been presented as a possible way out of the neoclassical approach of temporal choices, namely
the Austrian tradition, and more particularly the work of GLS Shackle (see Facchini 1999), which, according to us, doesn’t represent a sufficient and satisfactory alternative.

This paper represents a call for further research in epistemology: in particular, we believe that the work of Michel Foucault on the subject –cf. *L’Archéologie du Savoir*– has been largely overlooked by economists, and that it could provide a new way of looking at the complicated dialectics between theoretical models, social evolutions and political criticism.

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