

ISSN 2318-2377



TEXTO PARA DISCUSSÃO Nº 580

**OF TIME, UNCERTAINTY, AND POLICY-MAKING:
LIONEL ROBBINS' LOST PHILOSOPHY OF POLITICAL ECONOMY**

**Thiago Dumont Oliveira
Carlos Eduardo Suprinyak**

Maio de 2018

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

Jaime Arturo Ramírez (Reitor)

Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida (Vice-reitora)

Faculdade de Ciências Econômicas

Paula Miranda-Ribeiro (Diretora)

Lizia de Figueirêdo (Vice-diretora)

Centro de Desenvolvimento e Planejamento Regional (Cedeplar)

Mônica Viegas Andrade (Diretora)

Eduardo da Motta e Albuquerque (Vice-Diretor)

Laura Rodríguez Wong (Coordenadora do Programa de Pós-graduação em Demografia)

Gilberto de Assis Libânio (Coordenador do Programa de Pós-graduação em Economia)

Adriana de Miranda-Ribeiro (Chefe do Departamento de Demografia)

Edson Paulo Domingues (Chefe do Departamento de Ciências Econômicas)

Editores da série de Textos para Discussão

Aline Souza Magalhães (Economia)

Adriana de Miranda-Ribeiro (Demografia)

Secretaria Geral do Cedeplar

Maristela Dória (Secretária-Geral)

Simone Basques Sette dos Reis (Editoração)

<http://www.cedeplar.ufmg.br>

Textos para Discussão

A série de Textos para Discussão divulga resultados preliminares de estudos desenvolvidos no âmbito do Cedeplar, com o objetivo de compartilhar ideias e obter comentários e críticas da comunidade científica antes de seu envio para publicação final. Os Textos para Discussão do Cedeplar começaram a ser publicados em 1974 e têm se destacado pela diversidade de temas e áreas de pesquisa.

Ficha catalográfica

O48	Oliveira, Thiago Dumont.
2018	Of time, uncertainty, and policy-making : Lionel Robbins' lost philosophy of political economy / Thiago Dumont Oliveira, Carlos Eduardo Suprinyak. - Belo Horizonte : UFMG/CEDEPLAR, 2018.
	23 p. - (Texto para discussão, 580)
	Inclui bibliografia (p. 21-24)
	ISSN 2318-2377
	1. Economia. 2. Robbins, Lionel Robbins, \$c Baron, \$d 1898-1984. 3. Política econômica. I. Suprinyak, Carlos Eduardo. II. Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Centro de Desenvolvimento e Planejamento Regional. III. Título. IV. Série.
	CDD: 330

Ficha catalográfica elaborada pela Biblioteca da FACE/UFMG - JN044/2018

As opiniões contidas nesta publicação são de exclusiva responsabilidade do(s) autor(es), não exprimindo necessariamente o ponto de vista do Centro de Desenvolvimento e Planejamento Regional (Cedeplar), da Faculdade de Ciências Econômicas ou da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. É permitida a reprodução parcial deste texto e dos dados nele contidos, desde que citada a fonte. Reproduções do texto completo ou para fins comerciais são expressamente proibidas.

Opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect views of the publishers. The reproduction of parts of this paper of or data therein is allowed if properly cited. Commercial and full text reproductions are strictly forbidden.

**UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE MINAS GERAIS
FACULDADE DE CIÊNCIAS ECONÔMICAS
CENTRO DE DESENVOLVIMENTO E PLANEJAMENTO REGIONAL**

**OF TIME, UNCERTAINTY, AND POLICY-MAKING:
LIONEL ROBBINS' LOST PHILOSOPHY OF POLITICAL ECONOMY**

Thiago Dumont Oliveira

University of Siena

Carlos Eduardo Suprinyak

Cedeplar / Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG). The author would like to thank CNPq, Fapemig, and the European Commission's Jean Monnet program for their financial support.

**CEDEPLAR/FACE/UFMG
BELO HORIZONTE
2018**

SUMÁRIO

1. INTRODUCTION.....	6
2. FROM STATICS TO DYNAMICS: UNCERTAINTY AND THE ROLE OF TIME.....	7
3. THE ECONOMIST <i>QUAE</i> POLITICAL ECONOMIST	11
4. ROBBINS' LOST PHILOSOPHY OF POLITICAL ECONOMY: ECONOMICS AS A SOCIAL SCIENCE	15
5. FINAL REMARKS.....	19
REFERENCES.....	21

ABSTRACT

In the second edition of his methodological *Essay*, Lionel Robbins attributes a significant role to uncertainty, dynamics and the time element. Understanding the motives that led to these revisions may offer important clues to assess what happened to political economy ever since, and how far economics has diverged from Robbins' agenda. Our main claim is that these topics appeared on the second edition of the *Essay* because Robbins saw them as fundamental if economics (as a science) were to achieve its goal of being a useful tool for political economy, following the English Classical economists' distinction between science and art. His conception of science was thus tailored to his interests in political economy, rejecting attempts to mimic the methods of the natural sciences by preserving the human element that makes economics a social science.

Keywords: Lionel Robbins, Political Economy, Uncertainty, Time, Methodology of Economics.

RESUMO

O artigo discute a inclusão de questões relacionadas a incerteza, dinâmica e passagem do tempo na segunda edição do *Ensaio* metodológico de Lionel Robbins, argumentado que as motivações por trás dessas revisões podem ajudar a entender a redução do espaço da Economia Política desde então, assim como o distanciamento da ciência econômica em relação à trajetória vislumbrada por Robbins. Argumentamos que esses tópicos foram incluídos na segunda edição do *Ensaio* porque Robbins concebia-os como essenciais para que a Economia, enquanto ciência, pudesse se transformar em uma ferramenta de auxílio à Economia Política, seguindo a distinção proposta pelos economistas clássicos britânicos entre ciência e arte. Sua concepção de ciência foi, portanto, moldada pelo seu interesse na Economia Política, rejeitando tentativas de mimetizar os métodos das ciências naturais em favor da preservação do elemento humano que caracteriza a Economia como uma ciência social.

Keywords: Lionel Robbins, Economia Política, Incerteza, Tempo, Metodologia da Economia.

JEL: B20; B31; B40

1. INTRODUCTION

If we enquire into what has happened to political economy, it is tempting to conjecture what the answer would look like from the standpoint of Lionel Robbins. Trying to cope with such a delicate question by stepping into his shoes seems appropriate, since there is no comparable example of an economist who dealt as widely as he did with political economy (both as a scholar and an advisor) and, ironically, has been criticized as much he was (then and now) for excluding political affairs from the concerns of the economist, and for championing rational choice theory and the axiomatic method as they developed after the 1950s. Yet, a closer examination of his works raises important questions not only regarding Robbins' understanding of the relationship between economics and political economy, but also the epistemology underlying the nature of this relationship.

A clarification of Robbins' conception of economic science, and the hopes he entertained regarding the direction to which the discipline was headed (or at least should head), sheds much light on the extent to which economics has since considerably diverged from his epistemological tenets, and the related question of what happened to political economy. Looking through Robbins' lenses, one might argue that economics went astray because it failed to move from statics to dynamics, and to incorporate time and uncertainty in its analytical framework. Considerations of uncertainty and dynamics, however, were absent from the first edition of his famous *Essay*, while being given considerable weight in the second edition – even if the two versions were published only three years apart, in 1932 and 1935. We argue that debates about cyclical fluctuations, brought about by the lingering interwar crisis, offer an important but incomplete explanation for the inclusion of these topics in the revised edition. Robbins saw them as relevant also because of the way he conceived the relationship between economics and political economy; in other words, if the significance of economics lay in its role as a toolkit for political economy, then one had to account for salient features of the subject matter such as uncertainty and the time element.

Our argument comprises three interrelated parts. First, we show that the second edition of Robbins' *Essay* attributes a significant role to uncertainty, dynamics and the time element. Second, we argue that Robbins' early interest in the study of politics would accompany him throughout his life, and that his indebtedness to English classical economists extends further than the normative-positive divide. Finally, we claim that Robbins saw uncertainty, dynamics and the time element as fundamental to economics (as a science) if it were to achieve its goal of being a useful tool for political economy. His conception of economics and political economy was thus consistent with his (in)famous definition of economics: if the end of economics was to serve as a tool to orient public policies, then the means had to be suited to this end. Political economy thus logically preceded economics, and Robbins set himself to the task of defining the nature of economics (as a science) in accordance with its significance (as political economy).

2. FROM STATICS TO DYNAMICS: UNCERTAINTY AND THE ROLE OF TIME

There is much misunderstanding of Robbins' epistemology and little recognition of his discussion of dynamics, which was a lively issue in interwar economic debates. "In the 1920s and the 1930s," according to Bruna Ingraio & Giorgio Israel (1990, 223), "the common ground for intellectual confrontation (not excluding controversy) was a renewed interest in the economy's cyclical fluctuations". This concern was shared by Robertson, Keynes, Hayek, Schumpeter, Ohlin, Lindhal, Myrdal, and Hicks, among others, leading to an emphasis on "economic processes taking place *in time*," and bringing back to the fore the role of expectations, an important element of the English classical tradition:

Since the classical origins of political economy in Great Britain, discussion of the trade cycle had meant discussion of expectations, the expectations in a world of an uncertain future. J.S. Mill had put forward an explanation of 'trade crises' based on waves of optimistic expectations [...] causing a rise in speculation fed by credit. (Ingraio & Israel 1990, 225)

Robbins makes a similar point in his *The Theory of Economic Policy in English Classical Political Economy* (1952), arguing that English classical economists did not reason based on "mathematical or semi-mathematical conceptions of statical equilibrium"; instead their analyses were "much more dynamic and real than these exquisite laboratory models". Equilibrium was not conceived as a solution of a system of equations towards which the economy necessarily tends, but rather as a force directing "the tumultuous forces of self-interest" (1978, 16). The idea of proving the existence of equilibrium as a fixed point towards which the economy was moving was entirely alien to the classical economists, and to Robbins as well, since they did not assume that the conditions determining equilibrium would remain unchanged for long enough to permit such a state to be reached. Equilibrium was thus used to explain the conditions of change and the direction of movement, not a final position:

"Through history, the data change, and though at every moment there may be tendencies towards an equilibrium, yet from moment to moment it is not the same equilibrium towards which there is movement" (Robbins 1935, 62).

Robbins further notes that financial and economic crises were analyzed by the classical economists. Smith, for instance, favored bank regulation, defending the prohibition of small notes, while others like James Mill, Say, and the Ricardians "were inclined to attribute the occasional breakdowns of trade to errors of judgment and disproportionate developments of production" (1978, 30). The different conceptions of equilibrium are dealt with in more detail in his 'On a Certain Ambiguity in the Conception of Stationary Equilibrium', where he distinguishes the classical position from that of J. B. Clark:

It is perfectly true that in both the Clarkian and the classical construction the quantities of the factors of production are constant. *But* - and this is the fundamental difference which it is desired here to exhibit - *in the one, this constancy is the condition of equilibrium; in the other, it is simply one of the resultants of the equilibrating process*. In the Clarkian state, population and capital are to be constant – they are *not allowed* to vary. In the classical constructions, population and capital are constant, but this is because, together with wages and interest, etc., they have reached a position of rest (Robbins 1930, 204).

Like Hayek, therefore, Robbins believed that “more is to be learned by studying how market processes converge on equilibrium than by endlessly analyzing, as most modern economists do, the properties of final equilibrium states” (Blaug 1992, 81). As noted by Weintraub (1991, 18-19), however, by the time Samuelson read Robbins' paper, a quite different conception of equilibrium was gaining momentum.

Robbins' interest in uncertainty and dynamics may be due, to some extent, to his wide reading of the English classical economists. To O'Brien (1988, 114), having been “a Cannan pupil”, Robbins had “not only an excellent grounding in the subject but also an early love for it” (1988, 114).¹ Another of his early influences was Dennis Robertson, whom he credited with “constructions which penetrate further into the problems of modern economic dynamics than anything that had been written before” (1971, 223). Having read Robertson's *Study on Industrial Fluctuations* (1915) in 1923, Robbins felt he was responsible, alongside Keynes and Hawtrey, “for the revival and advancement of monetary and aggregate analysis in this country in our time” (1971, 220).

Nevertheless, even though Robbins may have been interested in uncertainty and dynamics since the early twenties, it remains to be explained why these topics grew considerably in importance in the second edition of the *Essay*, after being virtually absent from the first edition. This may be partially explained by the criticism directed at the first edition, and Robbins' attempt to clarify that he was not championing the detachment of economists from the management of public affairs; it may have also been a consequence of the revival of discussions about business cycles in the early thirties². Examples of Robbins' renewed interest in the matter include the theory of profits and the demand for money, the former being “essentially an analysis of the effects of uncertainty with regard to the future availability of scarce goods and scarce factors”, while the latter “can be deduced from the existence of the same uncertainties” (1935, 77-78). Phenomena as diverse as exchange, production, and fluctuation ought to be analyzed bearing in mind that “people do not know the full implications of what they are doing” (92). Likewise, dynamics should be a central concern of the economist since “the world of reality is not in a state of equilibrium, but rather exhibits the appearance of incessant change” (100). Even though static analyses were not suited for addressing practical problems and formulating public policies, however, they were still useful first steps for the ultimate goal of incorporating dynamic considerations:

[W]e study these statical problems not merely for their own sake, but in order to apply them to the explanation of change [...] their chief significance lies in their further application in economic dynamics. We study the laws of ‘rest’ in order to understand the laws of change (Robbins 1935, 103)

The most significant change between the two editions is that uncertainty went from largely undiscussed to the status of “main postulate of the theory of dynamics” (79). This is notable because, even though Robbins has been often criticized as an advocate of *homo economicus*, perfect rationality and perfect foresight were not central postulates of his theory, but rather auxiliary assumptions that

¹ O'Brien also claims that “Robbins made the greatest individual contribution to the revival of the study of the history of economic thought in Britain [...] It is not possible to discuss the attitudes of the Classical economists to policy matters without reference to” his book on English classical economists, and that *Robert Torrens and the Evolution of Classical Economics* (1958) is “one of the most important studies - possibly the most important study - of a single economist ever written” (O'Brien 1988, 114-115).

² For an overview of the early reactions to the first edition see Scarantino (2009) and Howson (2011, 232-234).

should be dropped as the discipline matured. Indeed, as early as 1927, he had already argued that *homo economicus* was but a temporary assumption:

Perhaps it would be as well to insist, at this point, that this is not the same as desiring to exclude the consideration, in its economic aspects, of action based upon ethical intentions. This is not a dispute about economic motive. Somewhere about 1950, economists may hope that journalists and others will discover that 'economic man' is no longer assumed in their discussions, and will cease to acquire cheap reputations by pompous denunciations of this obsolete fiction. But until that time it is as well to be explicit (Robbins 1927, 176)

In the early 1950s, when the axiomatization of economics was gaining momentum, he realized that his dream had not come true and lamented that economics was becoming more static and less dynamic:

It will surely come to be regarded as a paradox in the history of thought that, just at a period when the problems of economic dynamics were beginning to be successfully tackled by methods which can properly be described as extensions of the subjective theory of value, there should have developed a tendency to restate the static foundations in terms which deliberately eschew any reference to the subjective at all (Robbins 1953, 102).

Robbins' *Essay* is a product of its times, and the inclusion of uncertainty, dynamics, and the time element in the second edition reflects the increasing importance of these topics in the early 1930s. In 1933, Robbins spent his vacations in Austria, where he had conversations with Haberler and Machlup that were "to bear fruit in the second edition" of the *Essay* (Howson 2011, 240)³. More importantly, however, was the seminar led by him, Hayek, and Plant, and attended by Allen, Hicks, Kaldor, Lerner, and Rosentein-Rodan. The seminar had its golden years between 1933 and 1936 – among the papers discussed in 1933 were Hicks & Allen (1934), Hayek (1934), and Rosentein-Rodan (1934) (Howson 2011, 250). If Hicks (1979, 196) would later state that the work he did during his years at the LSE was "in large measure a collective work", the evolution of Robbins' ideas between the two editions of the *Essay* likewise owes much to the debates taking place at the LSE.

Examining the cross fertilization of ideas among these authors in the 1930s would take us very far from our goal, but a few words are in order. In Hicks' recollections of the period, he says he was "making an attempt [...] to make the Paretian system less static, so as to be able to incorporate planning over time, planning for a future which was not known in advance. Hayek was making us think of the productive process as a process in time" (1979, 199). Rosenstein-Rodan (1934) and Kaldor (1934)⁴, likewise, discuss the role of time, and Robbins credits the former's "illuminating article" for showing that there are "initial configurations of the data, which have no total tendency to equilibrium, but which rather tend to cumulative oscillation" (1935, 102). In the preface to second edition of the *Essay*, Robbins mentions having added some passages related to statics and dynamics, and said he hoped these changes

³ The second edition was written in the academic year 1934-1935, and Robbins sent a letter to Machlup in 1935 saying that he "owe[d] much more to conversations with you and Haberler on this matter than to anything which has so far been published in any journal" (quoted in Howson 2011, 271). In the *Essay*, when discussing some of the differences between the social and natural sciences, he acknowledges his indebtedness to Machlup (1935, 112).

⁴ See Setterfield (1998) for a thorough discussion of Kaldor's paper, where he argues that his later interest in path-dependency can be traced back to his 1934 paper.

“will be acceptable to my friends Professor F. A. von Hayek, Dr. P. N. Rosenstein Rodan and Dr. A. W. Stonier, whose advice and criticisms on these difficult matters have taught me much” (xi).

Uncertainty and time were central elements to Austrian economists, and Robbins saw Menger was the marginalist *par excellence*, so much so that he dubbed the so-called ‘marginal revolution’ as “the Mengerian revolution, which initiated this period of progress” (1935, 106)⁵. Yet Robbins was also influenced by Chicago economists, particularly Knight’s *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit* (1921). The book was used by Hicks in his lectures on risk starting in 1929, which was a “major area of Hicks’s interest at that time” and an offspring of “the alliance, more real than imagined, among LSE, Chicago, and Vienna” (Weintraub 1991, 30). Though Robbins cites Knight’s seminal work in both editions, the second edition refers to him in the context of discussions about uncertainty and dynamics (88-89). Such concerns must thus be framed in the appropriate context, and contrasted with developments taking place after the Second World War:

The course taken by Hicks [in *Value and Capital*] was not that of developing the abstract model of a pure futures economy. The real sources of disequilibrium are monetary instability. Hicks was still far from following the path of an abstract model of equilibrium, where everything was supposed to be decided in the single initial instant of time (Ingrao & Israel 1990, 240-241).

Weintraub (1991, 27) identifies a “transmogrification of the 1930s ‘conversation’ about statics and dynamics and equilibrium by the instrumentality of mathematical systems theory as it was introduced by Samuelson in the *Foundations*”. Even though Robbins, Keynes, Frisch, Tinbergen, and Hicks all held different conceptions of dynamics, one should bear in mind that debates about the business cycle were “a literature of process, not a literature of fixity and magnitude [...] the stability literature, as it developed in Samuelson’s work and in the literature based on the *Foundations*, did not necessarily concern business cycles” (23).

Robbins welcomed Hicks’ and Allen’s 1934 paper for helping his case against the legitimacy of psychological considerations as a concern for the economist. This is clear from his drawing a continuous line connecting Menger to Hicks in the *Essay*:

This notion can be expressed in various ways and with varying degrees of precision, from the simple want systems of Menger and the early Austrians to the more refined scales of relative valuations of Wicksteed and Schönfeld and the indifference systems of Pareto and Messrs. Hicks and Allen. But in the last analysis it reduces to this, that we can judge whether different possible experiences are of equivalent or greater or less importance to us (Robbins 1935, 75).

This leads us to our next section, where we argue that the appearance of the topics discussed in the second edition of the *Essay* cannot be explained solely by the context of the 1930s, even though this does offer a partial explanation. Robbins saw these topics as important due to his conception of the relationship between economics and political economy, and his understanding of economics as a social science, which differed significantly from the natural sciences. If economics had any hopes of contributing to the formulation of public policies, salient features of the economic process such as uncertainty and time could not be left unaccounted.

⁵ As Leonard (2010) notes, “in the first edition of [Carl Menger’s] *Grundsätze* we find a paragraph in the first chapter dealing with ‘Time and Error’ [...] Menger the son was thus quite aware [...] of the issue of uncertainty in economics”. Moreover, Karl Menger gave a lecture to the Austrian Society on the Saint Peter’s Paradox in 1927 which was attended by Hayek, Rosenstein-Rodan, Machlup, and Haberler (2010, 140-141).

3. THE ECONOMIST *QUAE* POLITICAL ECONOMIST

Robbins entered the LSE in 1920, specializing in the history of political ideas under Harold Laski (Howson, 2013). During his undergraduate years, however, he increasingly came to like economics, growing “sick of [the history of political ideas] because after a point it seemed so futile to go on studying it. [...] economics seems more fruitful in practical results and capable of yielding greater intellectual satisfaction”⁶. He wrote extensively on political economy, and it is out of the scope of this paper to assess his views on specific issues⁷. Instead, this section aims to show that he continuously argued, from one of his earliest writings in 1927 until his very last paper in 1981, that economics is an important tool to orient public policies⁸. In this he was following the distinction between political economy as an art and political economy as a science which “had become generally recognized” by the middle of the nineteenth century (Robbins 1963, 6)⁹.

The influence of the English classical economists on Robbins extends further than the normative-positive divide, an aspect seldom recognized. Robbins inherited the tradition of Senior, Mill, Cairnes, and Neville Keynes¹⁰, holding the view that while the science of political economy does not require verification – since its premises are discovered by introspection and thus necessarily true – the art of political economy, or the application of economic theory in current terminology, depends on empirical studies:

Over and over again, in Senior, in Mill, in Cairnes, and even in Jevons, we have found the notion that ‘verification’ is not a testing of economic theories to see whether they are true or false, but only a method of establishing the boundaries of application of theories (Blaug 1992, 71).

Robbins was thus part of a long tradition that downplayed the role of empirical evidence as a way of testing scientific theories, while regarding it as an essential element to bridge economics and political economy: “In the realm of Applied Economics [...] theory cannot be fruitfully applied to the interpretation of concrete situations unless it is informed continually of the changing background of the facts of particular industries” (Robbins 1935, 42). Robbins’ statement that “before we apply our general theory to the interpretation of a particular situation we must be sure of the facts” (81) is an almost word-for-word repetition of John Stuart Mill: “When the principles of Political Economy are to be applied to a particular case, then it is necessary to take into account all the individual circumstances of that case”¹¹. Other passages from Robbins likewise have a strong Millian flavor. In the preface to the second edition of the *Essay*, Robbins states that “an economist who is only an economist [...] is a pretty poor fish. [...] Economics affords no solution to any of the important problems of life [...] an education which consists of Economics alone is a very imperfect education” (1935, viii-ix). This echoes Mill when he says that

⁶ Robbins to Iris Gardiner, 24 June 1924 (cited by Howson 2004, 417)

⁷ Robbins (1937, 1939a, 1939b, 1954, 1963, 1997)

⁸ For a more detailed account of Robbins’s involvement as a political economist see Howson & Winch (1977), O’Brien (1988), Wright (1989), Howson & Moggridge (1990), Howson (2004, 2011), Masini (2009), Oliveira & Suprinyak (2016).

⁹ Robbins used the expression political economy to refer to political economy as art, and the expression economics as referring to political economy as science, but apart from the different terminology he strictly followed the English classical economists’ normative - positive distinction.

¹⁰ See Blaug (1992, ch. 3) for a fuller account.

¹¹ Mill (1844) cited in Blaug (1992, p. 58)

“the mere political economist, he who has studied no science but Political Economy, if he attempts to apply his science to practice, will fail”¹². Where he does not follow Mill, or at least the young Mill, is in his rejection of wealth as the ultimate end sought by individuals¹³. While he held on to utilitarianism, he saw it as part of political economy rather than economics:

For you cannot build prescriptions on a mere knowledge of positive facts, however systematized and comprehensive. You need a goal as well [...] It is all very well to know how the world works, why certain relations emerge in certain conditions, how these relations change when conditions are altered. But unless you have some test whereby you can distinguish good from bad, desirable consequences from undesirable, you are without an essential constituent of a theory of policy [...] This criterion the English Classical Economists found in the principle of utility. (Robbins 1978, 176-177)

Although English classical economists were not a homogeneous group, they “shared a common interest in economic reform” and believed “that the application of certain methods of approach and analysis, the recently discovered science of Political Economy, offered superior hopes for what they would have called improvement” (1978, 4). He thus challenges the notion that the members of this school were “indefatigable opponents of social reform” that “conceive no function for the state other than that of the night watchman” (5). Robbins’ works from the late 1930s reveal another import from the English classical economists: the idea of the “System of Economic Freedom” embedded in “a certain framework of law and order and certain governmental services” (11). As he explains, “you get an entirely distorted view of the significance of this doctrine unless you see it in combination with the theory of law and the functions of government which its authors also propounded; the idea of freedom *in vacuo* was entirely alien to their conceptions” (12). Robbins’ views on political economy are thus likely to be placed out of perspective if one ignores his indebtedness to the English classical economists.

In one of his earliest papers from 1927, one already finds many of the arguments that would reappear in the *Essay*, and that he would reiterate roughly fifty years later in his Richard T. Ely Lecture. First, he argues that “in the past, Economists have generally agreed that ethical criticism was not part of their business *as economists*” (1927, 174). Second, he claims that assuming utility as an end is not tantamount to utility maximization, and hence the framework of utility does not necessarily have a hidden ethical component¹⁴. Although for a hedonist the inclusion of utility in economic analysis would imply maximizing utility, he promptly rejects this notion: “Not holding a hedonistic psychology, I do not defend the proposition in question” (175).¹⁵ Third, normative issues must not be part of economics *quae* economics, if the economist has any hope of producing useful knowledge to guide the formulation of public policies. Excluding ethics from economics is thus a necessary condition if economics wants to acquire the status of a science:

¹² Mill (1844) cited in Blaug (1992, p. 58)

¹³ Reflecting on Mill’s *On Liberty* (1859), Robbins argues that “[f]or the author of *Liberty*, it was obviously much more important that choice should be free than that it should be good” (Robbins 1978, p. 185).

¹⁴ This argument is further developed in Robbins (1978, 181-186).

¹⁵ In the *Essay* he argues that people are motivated by various things other than money, such as the happiness of other people, prestige, and virtue: “Every first-year student since the days of Adam Smith has learnt to describe equilibrium [...] in terms of a tendency, *not* to the maximisation of *money gains*, but to the maximisation of *net advantages* in the various alternatives open” (1935, pp. 95-96).

What precision economists can claim at this stage is largely a sham precision. In the present state of knowledge, the man who can claim for economic science much exactitude is a quack. The problems of human motive we have to analyse with the 'vast amorphous phantoms' of psychology at their back, are nebulous enough in all conscience. It is not because we believe that our science is exact that we wish to exclude ethics from our analysis, but because we wish to confine our investigations to a subject about which positive statement of any kind is conceivable. It may be that an exact science of economics is forever unattainable [...] It is not a question of precision, it is a question of scientific intelligibility. Theoretically, the generalisations of economics could be tested by experiment. (Robbins 1927, 176)

He ends the paper with the argument that he would painstakingly try to develop in the *Essay*, only to find, for decades to come, that he would be subject to relentless criticism:

All that I am pleading for here is that we should preserve that separation of *science* from what at best must remain pure *opinion*, which has emerged so hardly from the irrationality of the pre-scientific era. By all means let us be willing to spill our opinions on the public. By all means let us try to make *our* categorical imperative *the* categorical imperative. But for the repute of that little area of knowledge which we can fence off from the wilderness of velleity and dogma, do not let us pretend to be talking economic science. Some day perhaps we may persuade the world that we understand those phenomena we call economic. Let us beware lest we jeopardise even this title to respect by claiming the same sanctions for judgments of value. (Robbins 1927, 178)

In 1930, Robbins participated in a committee under the Economic Advisory Council, with Keynes as chairman, to discuss the causes of the current economic crisis in England and propose remedies to accelerate recovery. The episode is enlightening for showing that when Robbins was directly involved in policy discussion, as he often was during his life, he resorted to knowledge that lay outside the realm of economics. He combined economic and non-economic arguments to support his positions and was always explicit about it. Robbins disagreed with Keynes both on economic grounds and broader political issues, refraining from signing the committee's draft¹⁶. One such sort of disagreement was the usefulness of tariffs and public works as tools for recovery. His skepticism was a product of his theoretical background, on one hand, and of his belief that 'nationalistic' policies would lead to a second world war, on the other. The reason for his objection was an argument constantly present in Robbins' works from the late 1930s:

[P]artly on profound scepticism in the whole philosophy of economic nationalism, of which the proposal to limit the investment of the surplus to the local government areas which we call nations, is such an important part. I do not pretend, however, that this last objection is purely 'economic' in character. If you want that kind of world then I suppose the economist, quae economist, has nothing to say about it. But I confess that I find it surprising that twelve years after the world war, rational beings should find the prospect of a series of right little, tight little national economies, busily engaged in reducing the volume of international exchange to a minimum, the sort of world they are willing to accept without a fight.¹⁷

¹⁶ His economic arguments were further developed in Robbins (1934) while his objections in the political economic realm would resurface in Robbins (1937, 1939a, 1939b).

¹⁷ P.L.R., Robbins/5/3, E.A.C (E.) 13, p. 27, September 23rd, 1930, emphasis in the original

It is interesting to note that the abovementioned quote – “the economist quae economist, has nothing to say about it” – points clearly to the demarcation between positive and normative economics later to be developed in the *Essay*. Economics (as a science) can only predict the effects of a policy; it cannot suggest whether or not it should be adopted, for this is a matter that lies in the realm of political economy. Leaving aside his economic objections to the use of tariffs, the political reason for his rejection of tariffs is a theme that would crystallize in his works from the late 1930s:

A tariff is an affirmation of separatism, a refusal to co-operate, a declaration of rivalry. That twelve years after a war which devastated civilisation and threatened to destroy the goodly heritage of European culture, we should even be discussing such matters, is a sad reminder, not only that some men lose faith in a good ideal when it is not realised quickly, but that most are totally blind.¹⁸

The *Essay* is about economics writ large, concerning both economics narrowly defined as a pure science and broadly understood as comprising political economy as well. We concur with Masini (2009) that the *Essay* was part of Robbins' lifetime project to demarcate the positive and normative spheres of economics, and to illuminate the extent to which the pure science of economics can shed light on practical questions. In this sense, the *Essay* should be understood as an effort to identify the boundaries between economics as a science and political economy, his ultimate goal being to develop a methodological justification for a scientific approach that could somehow orient the formulation of public policies: “Far from undermining the role of the economic advisor, Robbins's *Essay* was actually the necessary manifesto of the profession. It attempted to define exactly what might be asked of economists when required to give policy advice” (2009, 434).

In his Richard T. Ely Lecture, Robbins replied to the criticism directed towards the *Essay*. Nearly fifty years after its original publication, he was still struggling to make its main points clear. Robbins insists on the demarcation between economics and political economy, arguing once more that both are complementary for the purposes of policy analysis:

Needless to say I do not at all deny that, in the course of evolution of economics as we know it, there has been a good deal of intermixture of political and ethical discussion with the scientific discussion of fact and possibility [...] provided the logical difference between the two kinds of propositions is clearly kept in mind, I am in the least hostile to the combination (Robbins 1981, 4).

Economics was no panacea for Robbins; his claim was not that public policies can be fully determined based on economic knowledge, but that the tools of economics are useful to predict the outcomes of alternative public policies¹⁹. These outcomes, however, are not sufficient to rank alternative policies, since ‘better’ and ‘worse’ are not economic categories, but rather evaluations of the outcomes. People are free to choose less over more if they will, and this is not for the economist to decide. By the time the crowd starts deliberating who won the contest, the economist should be long gone. By then, he

¹⁸ P.L.R., Robbins/5/4, E.A.C (E.) 65, p. 4, October 22th, 1930

¹⁹ “it is important when we are called upon to deliver the verdict of economic science that we should continually guard against the appearance of feeling greater certainty than we have. It is not only in the year 1930 that the world will have need of the advice of economic experts” (P.L.R., E.A.C (E.) 13, Robbins/5/3, September 15th, 1930).

must have already completed his task, that of comparing the competitors in every possible objective basis. He may, of course, join the deputation, but he is logically impeded from doing so in his sole capacity as an economist:

[As long as] they are aware of what they are doing and do not claim scientific authority for conclusions which clearly go beyond science, there is much to be said for the practitioners of scientific economics discussing such questions of policy. They may not agree on the extra-scientific elements in their arguments. But, provided the distinction is observed, there is everything to be said for the discussions of policy to be conducted by those who are aware of the objective implications of the values on which policy rests. (Robbins 1981, 8)

4. ROBBINS' LOST PHILOSOPHY OF POLITICAL ECONOMY: ECONOMICS AS A SOCIAL SCIENCE

So far, we have argued that Robbins maintained throughout his life that economics was an important part of the toolkit of political economy, but that it should incorporate dynamic considerations and reduce its level of abstraction to become increasingly more useful for investigating practical problems. This section will connect these two points by arguing that his narrow conception of economics as a *science* was consistent with his broader view of economics as *political economy*. If the significance of economics lay in its usefulness for orienting public matters, then the nature of economics should accommodate the features that distinguish it from the natural sciences; since individuals are purposeful and uncertain about the future, the methods of the natural sciences are not applicable to economics. Robbins defended deductivism against criticism from the German historical school and the institutionalists, while simultaneously trying to preserve the *social* by insisting that, since atoms do not think, economics cannot mimic the methods of natural sciences. Robbins was thus restating “the Senior-Mill-Cairnes position in modern language,” but adding an Austrian twist to it by endorsing the means-ends definition of economics (Blaug 1992, 76). As argued by Giocoli (2003, 90), “Robbins’s reconstruction of the epistemological status of the key economic principles,” conflating English verificationism and Austrian deductivism, “offered an effective methodological compromise between the competing approaches to the ‘true’ nature of economic theory”.

Our claim is that even though the debates taking place in the 1930s help to explain the additions made to the second edition of the *Essay*, they do not exhaust the problem. Robbins saw uncertainty and dynamics as important issues because they fit in well with both his conception of economics as a *social science* – rejecting the methods of physics, logic and mathematics – and his views on the significance of economics as the toolkit of political economy, i.e., as a social *science*. It may be useful here to go back once again to his book on the English classical economists. Against denunciations of metaphysical contamination, he argues that while classical analysis “is teleological in the sense that, like all analysis of conduct, it runs in terms of purpose,” this does not deprive it of scientific status (1978, 23). The fact that individuals are purposeful does not imply a metaphysical character to classical economics. Instead, one should distinguish between metaphysics and science based on whether arguments are stated “dogmatically *a priori* or by way of appeal to experience” (24). Robbins would come back to this point in his Ely Lecture, stressing that economics is different from the natural sciences since individuals are

purposeful, i.e., “our explanations must to some extent be *teleological*” (1981, 2). Furthermore, unlike natural scientists, economists cannot make predictions, since individuals are able to learn and adapt to the environment. Time series may thus be an interesting method for analyzing the past, but not the future:

In natural science, once causal connections have been established, the quantitative relationships can usually be assumed to persist [...] this is not so in economics. [...] The same absence of persistence applies also on the side of obstacles. The human beings [...] are capable of learning. (Robbins 1981, 3)

Robbins' conception of science was in sharp contrast with logical positivism, since he rejected the idea of a unified science with logic and mathematics as the proper methodology for all scientific incursion, and introspection was central to his notion of the individual²⁰. While the Vienna Circle dismissed introspection as tantamount to metaphysics (Caldwell 1994, 16; Giocoli 2003, 30), Robbins saw introspection as preferable to hedonism and behaviorism since – unlike behaviorism – introspection maintains the purposefulness of individuals and their capacity to learn and adapt to a system in perpetual change, and – unlike hedonism – it does not equate utility with utility maximization: “So far as we are concerned, our economic subjects can be pure egoists, pure altruists, pure ascetics, pure sensualists or — what is much more likely — mixed bundles of all these impulses” (Robbins 1935, 95). Therefore, introspection did not resort to the mental processes through which individuals choose, while at the same time indicating that the postulates of economics were obvious truths that did not require empirical validation. Robbins could thus, at the same time, claim scientific status for economics and reject that it should follow the methods of the natural sciences:

It is a characteristic of scientific generalisations that they refer to reality. Whether they are cast in hypothetical or categorical form, they are distinguished from the propositions of pure logic and mathematics by the fact that in some sense their reference is to that which exists, or that which may exist, rather than to purely formal relations [...] If the premises relate to reality the deductions from them must have a similar point of reference [...] the methods of economic science – although not the tests of its logical consistency – are often different from the methods of the natural sciences. But it does not follow in the least that its generalisations have a ‘merely formal’ status – that they are ‘scholastic’ deductions from arbitrarily established definitions [...] it is a complete mistake to regard the economist, whatever his degree of ‘purity’, as concerned merely with pure deduction. (Robbins 1935, 104-105)

Robbins further regarded behaviorism as insufficient to explain economic phenomena such as the formation of prices precisely because of uncertainty. An objective explanation of prices based on observation was impossible because their determination depends on expectations about future prices, and hence subjectivism cannot be dispensed with. This, he says, is “one of the essential differences between the social and the physical sciences,” namely that the former deals “with conduct, which is in some sense purposive” and therefore “can never be completely assimilated to the procedure of the physical sciences” (89).

²⁰ For a discussion of logical positivism and logical empiricism see Caldwell (1994, chs. 2 and 3)

Robbins was aware of the debates taking place in the Vienna Circle and sent a letter to Machlup in 1934 saying he thought the second edition of the *Essay* could “meet Haberler & Kaufmann without sacrificing anything fundamental”²¹. The revised version of his book, however, did not bring Robbins’ position closer to the Vienna Circle. He thought his use of introspection was not significantly different from logical positivism, since he saw introspection simply as a specific form of observation²². Hence, he endorsed introspection and observation as criteria to differentiate science from metaphysics yet deemed that his appeal to inner observation did not imply “sacrificing anything fundamental”. Inner experience was analogous to empirical observation from the standpoint of scientific legitimacy, since we can observe our minds with accuracy and arrive at true statements that need not be empirically tested. As pointed by Caldwell (1994, 101), however, “the explanations which economists offer ultimately must refer to an individual’s subjective valuation process, which is *understandable*, but not *observable*,” hence the methods of the natural sciences are not applicable to economics. In his typically conciliatory style, Robbins refrained from engaging the philosophical debates taking place in the 1930s, as indicated in an unpublished appendix to the *Essay*: “I have made little or no allusion to recent controversial discussions of the ultimate status of economic generalizations. Indeed the careful reader, prying behind the actual structure of my sentences, may even detect a deliberate avoidance of terms which commit me to one view or the other”²³. Already in the preface to the first edition he clarifies the work was based on the practices of economists, and that he had “eschewed philosophical refinements as falling outside the province in which I have any claim to professional competence” (1932, viii).

In *The Significance and Basic Postulates of Economic Theory* (1938), Terence Hutchison criticized Robbins for championing the old-fashioned view that “stressed subjectivism, methodological individualism, and the self-evident nature of the basic postulates of economic theory” (Caldwell 1994, 99)²⁴. Even though Caldwell claims that Robbins does not dismiss the usefulness of empirical studies, simply limiting them to the “heuristic role [...] of suggesting new problems for theory to solve” (102), we have already argued that Robbins saw empirical studies also as essential to bridge the gap between theory and application²⁵. What authors as diverse as Senior, J.S. Mill, Cairnes, J.N. Keynes, Robbins, and Knight have in common is that “none of them recommended that economists try to falsify their theories by subjecting them to empirical test” (106). In hindsight, it was Hutchison’s rather than Robbins’ views that were embraced by economists, positing that economics should investigate laws that are falsifiable in principle (though not necessarily in practice), and that introspection be abandoned in favor of empirical investigations of economic behavior²⁶. Robbins’ attempt to preserve volition and uncertainty, insisting that economists study flesh and blood individuals (while eschewing psychology by clinging to introspection), and simultaneously affirming the scientific character of economics, was

²¹ Letter from Lionel Robbins to Fritz Machlup, January 1934, quoted in Howson (2011, p. 271).

²² “introspection [...] was universally regarded in the past, whatever may be the fashion today, as an ‘empirical’ technique of investigation, and sharply distinguished from intuition or ‘innate ideas’” (Viner 1958, cited in Blaug 1992, p. 74).

²³ Cited in Howson (2011, 272). She further notes that one of the reasons he presented for not picking sides on the controversy was his “philosophical incompetence”.

²⁴ Hutchison spent a year at the LSE in 1934 and moved to Bonn in 1935 where he wrote his 1938 book (Howson 2011, 271).

²⁵ Indeed, his *The Great Depression* (1934) has 36 pages of statistical appendix, and chapter 5 of the *Essay* discusses the role of empirical studies, for instance, in determining which theory is appropriate each problem.

²⁶ Whether economists consistently follow the tenets of positivism or simply pay lip service to it is, of course, an entirely different question.

perhaps an unstable compromise. Still, we may admire his effort to defend *social science* against what he saw as the lesser *social science* of the German Historical School and institutionalism and the *social science* of behaviorists and others attempting to mimic the methods of the natural sciences. While the soundness of his methodological position is debatable, his attitude of trying to bridge different traditions should not be overshadowed by the inherent difficulty in reconciling distinct points of view²⁷.

An interesting outcome of Robbins' conflation of many different elements in the *Essay*, as maintained by Hands (2009), is that "these philosophical tensions actually contributed to its influence". The double exclusion of hedonism and behaviorism "allowed Robbins' approach to accommodate, and steer a path through, the complex problem situation that confronted marginalist economics during the first third of the twentieth century" (831-832). Embracing introspection, however, ultimately meant affirming the difference between the social and the natural sciences. Robbins championed rational choice, but his conception of rationality – meaning simply that individuals are purposeful and can order their alternatives and make a choice between different means – was very different from the one currently prevailing²⁸. The fact that there are some elements in Robbins that are compatible with later developments does not mean he would support such developments, or that he should be regarded as a forerunner of axiomatics or rational choice theory. As Backhouse & Medema (2009) have shown, his definition would only be fully endorsed in the 1970s. Economics went through significant changes in the intervening decades, so that by the time his definition gained currency a different "image of science" was already established (Giocoli 2003). This new "image of science", however, had little in common with Robbins' own conception. At any rate, it is the rise of formal methods in economics that explains why his definition was embraced in the 1970s, rather than the reverse. His views were much more connected to past economists (the English classical tradition) and to contemporary ones (especially the Austrians) than to the future developments of economics, which he would almost certainly reject. Robbins did not champion purely formal relations as abstract schemata, arguing instead that the propositions of economics must refer to reality. More broadly, he insisted on the differences between the social and the natural sciences: individuals are rational in that they are purposeful, yet they make choices in an uncertain and constantly changing world. The regularities studied by natural scientists hardly occur in a social world:

[T]his is another of the methodological differences between the natural and the social sciences. In the natural sciences the transition from qualitative to quantitative is easy and inevitable. In the social sciences [...] it is in some connection almost impossible, and it is always associated with peril and difficulty. It seems clear, from what has happened already, that less harm is likely to be done by emphasising the differences between the social and the natural sciences than by emphasising their similarities. (Robbins 1935, 111-112)

²⁷ As an anecdote of his conciliatory prowess, Aaron Director commented on Robbins having written the Statement of Aims of the Mont Pelerin Society that "nobody else at the meeting [...] could have reconciled the differences in politics among the participants [...] as well as Robbins. After we had spent days discussing these issues and tried to draft a statement, Lionel finally took it over and drafted the one we all signed" (cited by Ebenstein 2001, 145). Howson (2013, 115) also notes that Robbins thought intellectuals should not engage with any party lest they lose their intellectual independence: "By the time he became a peer in 1959, he had voted for all three major parties; in the Lords he sat on the cross benches". Though his conciliatory stance may be partially a trait of his personality, the environment he found at the LSE helps to explain his views on the relationship between social science and politics (Suprinyak & Oliveira, 2018 forthcoming).

²⁸ For a discussion see Brown & Spencer (2007), Falgueras-Sorauren (2007), Ross (2007), Oliveira & Suprinyak (2018).

Though Robbins became famous for his definition of economics, conceiving economics as the science that studies the choices of individuals does not tell us much about Robbins' conception of science and of how individuals make their choices. Within his general definition there is scope for different approaches such as hedonism, behaviorism, and introspection, which significantly impact how economists theorize. Hence, while Robbins is often thought of as a precursor to rational choice theory and axiomatization, one must recognize that his rejection of hedonism and behaviorism, favoring introspection and subjectivism instead, implied he did not conceive economics on a par with neither mathematics nor physics. His understanding of 'economics in time', and the central role of uncertainty, ruled out determinism and hence the possibility of establishing mechanical analogies or building a strictly formal system of relations. Individuals err and learn, hence economics is a science that studies the choices of individuals in a system of perpetual change. Introspection also meant attachment to reality, for he saw what he was describing as human faculties as obviously true, not requiring any experiments to validate them. It followed, so he thought, that deductions from assumptions which were trivial would themselves also be true.

While Robbins claimed he was simply stating the main principles of economics as they already existed, the conflation of different traditions meant a peculiar way of conceiving economics that is difficult to label as belonging to any school of thought. Yet, it was his definition of economics narrowly understood that gained currency, not his conception of economics as a science that, by merging general equilibrium in the Lausanne tradition with Austrian subjectivism, would be a powerful tool to orient public policies, following the English classical economists' demarcation of science and art. While one might debate whether a stable compromise among so many different elements could be achieved, the fact remains that his conception of subject differs a great deal from the methodological precepts of mainstream economics as it developed after the 1950s.

5. FINAL REMARKS

Even though considerations of uncertainty, time, and dynamics were central to the second edition of Robbins' *Essay*, they were virtually absent from the first edition of his seminal work. These changes can be partially explained by the economic context of the 1930s, with discussions of business cycles and economic fluctuations coming to the fore. More importantly, however, they reflect how Robbins conceived the relationship between economics and political economy. Although Robbins' lost philosophy of political economy may be criticized on many grounds, the importance he attributed to time, uncertainty, and dynamics, together with his conception of economics as the toolkit to orient political economy, are all important questions that are not often addressed by contemporary economists. Not only were theoretical concepts essential to analyze a system in perpetual change thus gradually, but also the nature of the relationship between economics and political economy suggested by Robbins went unnoticed.

Whether Robbins' conception of a value-free science is indeed achievable is still an open question among philosophers of science (Scarantino 2009). Another possible criticism of Robbins is that his hope that economics would become increasingly more useful for practical problems was hindered by the theory of value he endorsed (Brown & Spencer 2012). These are valuable objections and

important elements to assess the contemporary state of economics and political economy. Our main point, however, is not to argue that Robbins' nuanced program offers an effective solution for contemporary conundrums, but rather that revisiting his works and their intellectual context may provide suggestions about how economics and political economy could be brought closer together after a long period of drifting apart from one another, and a window into what happened to political economy when seen through lenses of postwar economics.

If the 1940s and 1950s mark the rise of formalization in economics, there has been a more recent shift from the Cowles econometric approach to quasi-experimental methods, which have grown considerably in importance since 1990. This shift has its origins in the disarray in which the simultaneous equations approach fell during the 1980s, with its contested reliance on economic theories based on the optimization of agents or firms (Biddle & Hamermesh 2017; Panhans & Singleton 2017). Even though our argument about the fate of political economy invokes the formalization of economics in the immediate postwar era, and the consolidation of logical positivism at the expense of Lionel Robbins' old fashioned philosophical precepts, we may also ponder whether the current 'de-mathematization' of economics is bringing it closer again to political economy. If economics has certainly been relying less on theoretical models and becoming more data-driven in recent decades, and hence more applicable to policy matters, this does not necessarily mean that political economy is resurfacing. Economics may be turning into a more useful instrument for designing public policies, but it remains to be seen whether the social, political, and institutional elements that were extruded in the transition from political economy to economics will have any important role to play in the new era of data-driven economics.

REFERENCES

Primary Source

The Papers of Lionel Robbins, LSE archives, London.

Other References

- Backhouse, R. E. & Medema, S. G. (2009). “Defining economics: the long road to acceptance of the Robbins’ definition”, *Economica*, 76, (1), 805–820.
- Biddle, J. E. & Hamermesh, D. S. (2017). “Theory and Measurement: Emergence, Consolidation, and Erosion of a Consensus”, *History of Political Economy*, 49 (supplement), 34–57.
- Blaug, M. (1992). *The Methodology of Economics: Or How Economists Explain*, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition.
- Brown, A. & Spencer, D. A. (2007). “Cost and the ‘Means-End’ definition of economics in Lionel Robbins’ *Essay*: analysis and contemporary implications”, In: Cowell, F., Witztum, A. (Eds.), *Lionel Robbins’ Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science 75th Anniversary Conference Proceedings*, London, 244–261.
- (2012), “The nature of economics and the failings of the mainstream: lessons from Lionel Robbins’s *Essay*”, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 36, 4, 781–798.
- Caldwell, B. J. (1994). *Beyond Positivism: Economic Methodology in the Twentieth Century*, London: Routledge, 2nd edition.
- Ebenstein, A. (2001). *Friederich Hayek: A Biography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Falgueras-Sorauren, I. (2007). “Is Robbins’ definition necessarily imperialistic? The demarcation of economics in Robbins’ *Essay* and the concepts of real and formal scarcity”, In: Cowell, F., Witztum, A. (Eds.), *Lionel Robbins’ Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science 75th Anniversary Conference Proceedings*, London, 16–37.
- Giocoli, N. (2003). *Modeling rational agents: From interwar economics to early modern game theory*, Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Hands, D. W. (2009). “Effective Tension in Robbins’ Economic Methodology”, *Economica*, 76, 831–844.
- Hayek, F. A. (1934). “On the relationship between investment and output”, *Economic Journal*, 44, 207–31.
- Hicks, J. R. (1979). “The Formation of an Economist”, *Banca Nazionale del Lavoro Quarterly Review*, September, 195–204.
- Hicks, J.R. & Allen, R.G.D. (1934). “A reconsideration of the theory of value. Part 1”, *Economica*, ns, 1, 1, 52–76.
- Hicks, J.R. & Allen, R.G.D. (1934). “A reconsideration of the theory of value. Part 2 - A Mathematical Theory of Individual Demand Functions”, *Economica*, ns, 1, 2, 196–219.

- Howson, S. & Moggridge, D. E. (1990). *The Wartime Diaries of Lionel Robbins and James Meade, 1943-45*, London: Macmillan.
- Howson, S. & Winch, D. (1977). *The Economic Advisory Council, 1930–39: A Study in Economic Advice During Depression and Recovery*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Howson, S. (2004). “The origins of Lionel Robbins’s Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science”, *History of Political Economy*, 36, 3, 413-443.
- (2011). *Lionel Robbins*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- (2013). “Lionel Robbins: Political Economist”, *History of Political Economy*, 45 (annual suppl.), 114-136.
- Hutchison, T.W. (1938). *The Significance and Basic Postulates of Economic Theory*, London: Macmillan.
- Ingrao, B. & Giorgio I. (1990). *The invisible hand: economic equilibrium in the history of science*, MA: MIT Press Cambridge.
- Kaldor, N. (1934). “A classificatory note on the determinateness of equilibrium”, *Review of Economic Studies*, 1, 122–36.
- Leonard, R. (2010). *Von Neumann, Morgenstern, and the Creation of Game Theory: From Chess to Social Science, 1900-1960*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Masini, F. (2009). “Economics and Political Economy in Lionel Robbins's Writings”, *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 31, 4, 421-436.
- Mill, J. S. (1844). *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy*, London: J.W. Parker.
- 1859, *On Liberty*, London: J.W. Parker.
- O’Brien, D. P. (1988). “Lionel Charles Robbins, 1898-1984”. *The Economic Journal*, 98, 104-125.
- Oliveira, T. D. & Suprinyak, C. E. (2016). “The economist quae political economist: Lionel Robbins and the Economic Advisory Council”, *Cedeplar Working Paper*, 535. Belo Horizonte: Cedeplar/UFGM.
- (2018). “The nature and significance of Lionel Robbins’ methodological individualism”, *Economia* 19, 1, 24–37.
- Robbins, L. (1927). “Mr. Hawtrey on the Scope of Economics”. *Economica*, 20, 172-178.
- (1930). “On a Certain Ambiguity in the Conception of Stationary Equilibrium”, *The Economic Journal*, 40, 158, 194-214.
- (1932). *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, London: Macmillan.
- (1934). *The Great Depression*, London: Macmillan.
- (1935). *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, London: Macmillan, 2nd edition.
- (1937). *Economic Planning and International Order*, London: Macmillan.

- (1939a). *The Economic Basis of Class Conflict and Other Essays in Political Economy*, London: Macmillan.
- (1939b). *The Economic Causes of War*, London: Jonathan Cape.
- (1953). “Robertson on Utility and Scope”, *Economica*, ns, 20, 78, 99-111.
- (1954). *The Economist in the Twentieth Century and Other Lectures in Political Economy*. London: Macmillan.
- (1958). *Robert Torrens and the Evolution of Classical Economics*. London: Macmillan.
- (1963). *Politics and Economics: Papers in Political Economy*. London, Macmillan.
- (1971). *Autobiography of an Economist*, London & Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- (1978). *The theory of economic policy in English classical political economy*. London: Macmillan, 2nd ed.
- (1981). “Economics and Political Economy”, *The American Economic Review*, 71, 2, 1-10.
- (1997). *Economic Science and Political Economy: Selected Articles of Lionel Robbins*, Susan Howson (ed.), London: Macmillan.
- Robertson, D. H. (1915). *A Study of Industrial Fluctuation: an Enquiry into the Character of the So-called Cyclical Movements of Trade*, London: P.S. King.
- Ross, D. (2007). “Robbins, positivism and the demarcation of economics from psychology”, In: Cowell, F., Witztum, A. (Eds.), *Lionel Robbins' Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science 75th Anniversary Conference Proceedings*. London, 120–151.
- Rosenstein-Rodan, P. N. (1934). “The Rôle of Time in Economic Theory. *Economica*”, ns, 1, 1, 77-97.
- Samuelson, P. A. (1947). *Foundations of Economic Analysis*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Scarantino, A. (2009). “On the role of values in economic science: Robbins and his critics”, *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 31, 4, 449-473.
- Setterfield, M. (1998). “History versus equilibrium: Nicholas Kaldor on historical time and economic theory”, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 22, 521-537.
- Sugden, R. (2009). “Can economics be founded on ‘indisputable facts of experience’? Lionel Robbins and the pioneers of neoclassical economics”, *Economica*, 76, 1, 857-872.
- Suprinyak, C. E. & Oliveira, T. D. (2018, forthcoming). “Economists, social scientists, and the reconstruction of the world order in interwar Britain”, *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 25, 6.
- Viner, J. (1958). *The Long View and the Short*, Glencoe: The Free Press.
- Weintraub E. R. (1991). *Stabilizing Dynamics: Constructing Economic Knowledge*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Wright, R. (1989). “Robbins as a Political Economist: A Response to O’Brien”, *Economic Journal*, 99, 471-478.