



Meme Wars: The Creative Destruction of Neoclassical Economics

Kalle Lasn (Editor) , Adbusters (Editor)

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"Engrossing, exciting [...] This book compels us to rethink our approaches to economics ..." —*Literary Review of Canada*

"Thought-provoking and creative [...]" —Julie Nelson, author of *Beyond Economic Man: Feminist Theory and Economics*

From the editor and magazine that started and named the Occupy Wall Street movement, *Meme Wars: The Creative Destruction of Neoclassical Economics* is an articulation of what could be the next steps in rethinking and remaking our world that challenges and debunks many of the assumptions of neoclassical economics and brings to light a more ecological model. *Meme Wars* aims to accelerate the shift into this new paradigm that takes into account psychonomics, bionomics, and other aspects of our physical and mental environment that are often left out in discussions of economics.

Like *Adbusters*, the book will be image heavy and full-color throughout. Lasn calls it "a textbook for the future" that provides the building blocks, in texts and visuals, for a new way of looking at and changing our world. Through an examination of alternative economies, Lasn hopes to spur students to become "barefoot economists" and to see that a humanization of economics is possible. *Meme Wars* will include contributions from Nobel Prize winner Joseph Stiglitz, Paul Samuelson, George Akerlof, Lourdes Benería, Julie Matthaei, Manfred Max-Neef, David Orrell, Paul Gilding, Mathis Wackernagel and the father of ecological economics Herman Daly, among others.

Based on ideas that were presented in a special issue of *Adbusters* entitled "Thought Control in Economics: Beyond the Growth Paradigm / An Activist Toolkit," *Meme Wars* will help move forward the Occupy Wall Street movement.

Meme Wars: The Creative Destruction of Neoclassical Economics Details

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From Reader Review Meme Wars: The Creative Destruction of Neoclassical Economics for online ebook

Dan Meier says

The best book I've read yet this year!

Lara Thompson says

At times pure genius, other times... less good. Many of the articles are drawn from reputable sources by authors of respected standing (a few Nobel Laureates in the mix). Nearly all are very well written. If you've read/flipped through Adbusters, this is put together by the same guy and has the same feel overall. Very important ideas on all that's wrong in today's economic models. I'll pursue further reading by a few of the contributors.

Available free from Lasn's website: <http://kickitover.org/economics-textb...>

Mitch Allen says

Unique look at contemporary economics and how it could be reformed to drive changes in the destructive consumer culture. Fast-paced, visual, beautifully designed and delivered.

Isha says

Meme wars is about economics, society and the world today. An adult picture book with many words to make your feel better.

Honestly, this book is amazing, full of remarkable facts and figures that one wouldn't know otherwise.

However, as I haven't even been taught economics, the book can be a challenge.

Kalle Lasn has a chatty, informal way of looking and that is reflected throughout the book.

The layout is really interesting and the little questions make you think deeper than superficial.

"Does life on earth have any meaning?"

Many inspirational quotes are dotted all over the book and truthfully, they really make you ponder. Realise how much influence media and others have on us. How society wants us to be. What people in the past had to say about the future and how true it is.

Overall I would recommend this book to any students taking economics or anyone who likes to think 'outside the box' and know about things that one wouldn't typically think of.

"If The Old American Dream Was About Prosperity, Perhaps The New One Will Be About Spontaneity..."

Steve Mahr says

One of the most influential books I have ever read. This book did for me in the area of lifestyle what Jesus for President did for me in how I understand Christ/Poverty/Violence. It is an eye-opening, mind-blowing,

upsetting and yet hopeful critique on our entire global operating system.

Brian says

For those who think that anarchists and Occupy movement types are thoughtless and without theoretical foundations, this book compiled by the Adbusters group under founder Kalle Lasn's direction is a must read. It focuses on economic theory, critiquing the current paradigm (neoclassicism), but offering an amazing array of competing theories and visions.

Alex Boerger says

This Book contains great insight and ideas. Many Perspectives I never thought about. But I was missing the meme part. I read a lot about memetics and so i expected something else. I was hoping for some thoughts about the question: Where do the current memes come from and what we can do about it.

Timothy Chklovski says

A book-sized pamphlet encouraging readers to challenge their professors and generally disrupt consumerism. Picked it up for the title, and looked through it because I subscribe to the idea of seeking disconfirming evidence.

Although I'm clearly not the target audience, I found its presentation style interesting (if "noisy", which I think it somewhat hypocritically critiques capitalist systems for).

As one might expect, the book overlooks the benefits that rule of law and economic prosperity bring; its critiques, however, are meaningful:

- markets at equilibrium of supply and demand can still leave tons of people "starving since they can't provide the demand" -- ie while equilibrium optimizes supply/demand, one may want to have an objective function that accounts for human well-being
- advertising is a form of pollution
- modern, consumption-oriented lifestyle separates us from other, simpler pleasures of experiencing nature (with focus squarely on the pleasant parts of experiencing nature without modern safety nets)
- ignoring negative externalities such as pollution and its present and future costs is dangerous; exponential growth of resource consumption is unsustainable
- people are happier if they have more social interactions, so optimizing income at expense of time off may be suboptimal
- people are bad at predicting their own happiness (they think they would be happier spending \$5 or \$20 given to them on themselves, whereas the opposite turns out to be true -- pro social spending feels better in retrospect
- economics as it is typically taught overemphasizes perfect competition and equilibria, whereas in the real world one can have abnormal, monopolistic profits collected by large corporations through high advertising spending, political lobbying, etc (the book suggests protesting and fighting such corporate power by opting out of banking at large banks and so on; unfortunately, propaganda is most effective when it encourages people not to think; this book asks for its target audience to rethink things)

I also leaned about the Moniac from this oddball book, which is a hydraulic contraption modeling the money flows into the economy, complete with things like taxes, monetary reserve, etc.

Masha says

I picked it up thinking it would be about memes... but it's just about economics. Presents dissenting views from maverick economists, environmentalists, etc. The first half was really good with lots of interesting historical tidbits and analyses, the second half got a bit woo, but it was still enjoyable to read. I loved the design of it too--it was a bit cheesy at times but I love design that is earnest and unashamed, it made it a really pleasant and aesthetic experience to complement the intellectual content.

Andy Mitchell says

This book is weird.
And thought-provoking.

It put me to sleep several times, even though I loved the intellectual challenge of following the many essays challenging MSNBC financial beliefs.

This book is hard work, full of pictures and essays and strange collages.

I give it my highest recommendation. Even though you'll probably hate it.

Brett says

The rhetoric may be a bit repetitive/radical for some, but considering the topic I think it's well deserved.

Anna says

Where was this book ten years ago? I really needed it when I was eighteen, fresh from being frustrated by the blinkered stupidity of A-level economics and disappointed that the economics paper in my undergraduate course seemed little better. 'Meme Wars' is intended as an antidote to standard neoclassical economics textbooks, such as bloody Mankiw (the unchallenged assumptions in that book drove me mad). As such, I think it works well. 'Meme Wars' uses the same format as Adbusters magazine, which is well worth reading if you can find it in a newsagent. This intersperses pieces on heterodox economic thought and politics with full-page art pieces. I like this approach, which gives the book a satisfying heft as well as keeping the eyes and mind stimulated. As a warning, though, the absence of contents page or index means you can't go back and find a particular piece without leafing through the whole thing. There aren't any page numbers, either, so you have to rely on the distinctiveness of the imagery. Which, admittedly, is very distinctive.

I thought the range of critiques of neoclassical economics were well chosen as an introduction to the

heterodox field. In addition to well-known theorists like Herman Daly, E. F. Schumacher, Joseph Stiglitz, and George Akerlof, the work of many others is covered, most of whom were new to me. I also appreciated the thoroughness of the critique of GDP, which really deserves to be abandoned as a useful metric. It is fair to say, however, that the perspective of this book is largely white, male, and American. On the one hand, not again. On the other hand, it is also white, male, and American voices who do the most to promulgate neoclassical economics and thus have the strongest need to critique their assumptions. So I am ambivalent about this point.

I cannot let one piece pass without mention, though, as it is perhaps the most jaw-droppingly ironic thing I've ever read. Here is a quote:

To be fair, no matter how much wealth a person possesses, each person's consumption is equal. [...] A Bill Gates or Steve Jobs can still soar and be heroes of civilisation and celebrated by all, but they will live just like everyone else in a one-planet footprint. Thus we will guide and transform the whole society from a "selfish" society to a "selfless" society.

This seems like a very laudable utopian ideal, does it not? But consider the earlier context for the above statement:

In the past two hundred years of the vigorous international communist movement and the ninety years of history of the Communist Party of China, millions of people have sacrificed their lives for the realisation of a communist ideal [...] The international communist movement is not defeated by capitalism but defers [sic?] to develop its own theory. Socialism with Chinese characteristics is still pressing ahead.

Yes, this is the view of the Chinese government. The same government that has shown how the largest and fastest-growing market economy in the world can also profess communism. The same government that has energetically refuted Fukuyama's notion that market economics and representative democracy require one another to thrive. The same government that fosters vast inequalities in wealth, corruption at a gigantic scale, and the denial of any democratic freedoms to its citizens. The sad thing is, the developed world is vastly hypocritical in its criticism of China for these things, as well as the extent to which China is blamed for increases in world carbon emissions. (Looking at the total stock of carbon shoved into the atmosphere by the industrialisation of Europe puts this in perspective.) In America, Republican politicians express admiration for China's lack of social security and wage protection. The UK's democratic freedoms certainly aren't what they once were. The level of irony can hardly be encompassed in words.

Essentially, I think that this particular piece needs a caveat that it is, like the vast majority of the rest of the book, aspirational. Communist China is not actually a utopia and the millions who starved or were killed in China during Mao's regime did so in the name of totalitarianism, not 'a selfless society'. Nowadays, those dying prematurely due to terrible rates of pollution might say the same, except that the totalitarian idol has shifted to an abstraction of economic progress. Thanks, neoclassical economics.

That aside, 'Meme Wars' is definitely thought-provoking and very much worth reading. I think I'd have appreciated it more when I was a member of its target audience - undergraduate students dissatisfied with the neoclassical economics being rammed down their throats. I'll recommend it to the undergrads that I sometimes teach, in fact.

Vlad says

Splendid call for ACTION!

Gage Wente says

A great idea with an interesting execution, but it ended up too cursory. I feel like I learned very little for how much I read. While it did plant some seeds for things I'd like to learn more about, I think it would've functioned better as a magazine.
