

Editorial Preface to "Views and Comments on Economics and Evolution"

by

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Views and Comments on Economics and Evolution

Editorial Preface

The following comments illuminate a spectrum of different notions and problems surrounding dissemination processes in the social sciences. Stated very abstractly, surviving alternatives are explained by their superiority over other feasible alternatives. This renders a surviving variant dependent on the entire set of feasible alternatives (which is usually unobservable) as well as on its internal stability. The feasibility constraints and the internal stability of surviving variants are important, and evolutionary approaches may differ according to the assumptions made regarding the possibilities along the evolutionary path. Thus, evolutionary thinking may explain behavior, or institutions, not from a void, but as flowing from some more fundamental behavioral regularities that govern the feasibility and internal stability of alternatives in the process of social evolution. It remains a matter of disagreement which problems are better tackled in such an indirect fashion, and which should be attacked more directly in the traditional way. The views and comments gathered here consider these and other issues from quite different perspectives and suggest different conclusions. No single coherent "evolutionary approach" seems to emerge from that, but many important issues are raised, and answers to important questions are suggested that illustrate the vitality of this very old and very new line of thought.

Ekkehart Schlicht

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