REMEMBERING ULRICH FEHL, GERMAN ECONOMIST AND PROMINENT SCHOLAR WITH A DEEP KNOWLEDGE OF AUSTRIAN ECONOMICS

PETER ENGELHARD*

Prof. Ulrich Fehl, emeritus at Marburg University, died on November 9, 2019 at the age of 80 years. He was buried in the cemetery on Wiesenweg, Marburg. Ulrich Fehl left behind his wife Barbara and daughter Vera. Standing by Prof. Fehl's open grave, we struggled with our deep grief and admired his family's firm composure. Almost comforting as prayer and the good words of the pastor, however, was the German tradition of gathering after the funeral. Goulash soup and sandwiches, served according to old custom, brought pleasant memories of Ulrich Fehl to family, friends, former colleagues and students. Memories not only of a scientist with the broadest of scholarly interests, but memories also of a great personality of benevolence, respect for everybody and a fine dry humor, the friendly elegance with which he parried in discussion and conversation. Memories of long, never tedious, and most inspiring discourses with our academic teacher. Everyday work with Prof. Fehl came to our mind again, as when he arrived in his 18-year-old green Audi sedan at the campus always precisely 10 minutes behind the agreed time—nevertheless making it

* Peter Engelhard (petengelha@gmx.net) is a private scholar living in Germany.

always exactly on time to the lecture hall. Talking on such topics in increasingly good spirits, we became aware: Prof. Fehl will be among us as long as we remember him as a man and as long as we cultivate his scientific heritage.

Ulrich Fehl was born on January 27, 1939 as the son of a miner's family in Bochum. After graduation, he first completed a commercial apprenticeship at the German oil company ARAL, now part of BP. Only then did he acquire a university entrance qualification and finally studied economics in Münster, Giessen and Nuremberg. Ulrich Fehl was already extremely well read as a young man. No wonder he easily fulfilled the strict requirements of a German government scholarship. He graduated with two degrees—business and economics. His calling, however, was to live and work as a scholar. In 1971 he received his Ph.D. from Philipps University at Marburg. His thesis, "Produktionsfunktionsfunktion und Produktionsperiode" (1973) deals with fundamental issues of Austrian capital theory. In 1981 he achieved the *venia legendi* for economics with a major elaboration on competition processes in Walrasian perspective. Carl von Ossietzky University at Oldenburg appointed him full professor of economics in 1981. Finally, Fehl returned to Marburg in 1987 to hold the chair for General Economic Theory until his retirement in 2004. He also served as director of Philipps University's Institute of Cooperatives. Fehl left behind a comprehensive scientific work, whose emphasis lies in the theory of capital, market process theory as well as Austrian and evolutionary economics.

Ulrich Fehl's methodology was much influenced by his academic teacher Ernst Heuß (1922–2010). Heuß's theory of the succession of market phases combines the theory of entrepreneurship with market development, and incorporates the development of knowledge and strategic behavior in the market place. Fehl added the total market perspective to this approach, thus achieving an important improvement. The core of his theory is the discovery and emergence of new knowledge in the process. His formal mathematical analyses also leave behind standard equilibrium theory. The focus is on learning and the resulting change in human action. This idea not only shaped his academic research, but also shaped the textbook on basic microeconomics which he published in 1976 together with Peter Oberender (1941–2015). The didactics are based on Ernst Heuß's "Grundelemente der Wirtschaftstheorie"

(1970) which—unlike the “Grundelemente”—also contains a part on macroeconomics. Fehl himself had worked on a textbook on macroeconomics that is consequently based on micro-foundations. His university lectures on macroeconomics were structured like this, but he could not finish a second textbook on this subject in his lifetime. Fehl’s didactic approach to microeconomics, however, consequently takes its starting point in the market process and dispenses of, unlike many other textbooks, a lengthy declination of the entities and categories of this subject matter.

During the 1980s, Ulrich Fehl got into personal contact with important protagonists of neo-Austrian economics such as Ludwig M. Lachmann and Israel M. Kirzner, which gave important new impulses to his reasoning on the market process. He was particularly proud of the fact that he had been invited to contribute a piece on the Lachmann-O’Driscoll problem to Kirzner’s anthology of essays in honor of Ludwig M. Lachmann on his eightieth birthday (Fehl 1986). Furthermore, Fehl dove deeply into Friedrich A. von Hayek’s work. The emergence of an economic order out of persistent equilibration and disequilibration in the market process was a truly Austrian and pivotal element in his thinking.

Ulrich Fehl’s approach to capital theory is based on the Austrian temporal methodology which may be considered as an alternative to the neo-classic capital theory. In “Produktionsfunktion und Produktionsperiode” he analyzes how far the concept of production period may be used to measure capital, given that processes of capital formation are circular, i.e. capital is used to create capital. Furthermore, Fehl evaluated the Wicksell effect in a process perspective. Another contribution to capital theory is his analysis of technical progress, employment, and production (Fehl 1975, 1976).

Connected to his chair of economic theory at Marburg University was the office of being a director of the local institute for research on cooperatives. This office opened another field of fruitful economic thinking for Ulrich Fehl. He perceived cooperatives as spontaneous associations of independent market actors with very particular modes of organization and operating challenges. Cooperatives are vehicles for problem solving and testing economic hypotheses in the market place and, hence, became part of Fehl’s research program in evolutionary economics.

Ulrich Fehl was a universally educated scholar. His teaching and writing covered the full range of micro- and macroeconomics. Holding the chair of General Economic Theory at Marburg University offered the opportunity of making full didactic use of the manifold synergies between the different branches of economics—a situation which has become rare nowadays against the backdrop of increasing specialization and intellectual fragmentation in academic life. Despite playing—at his time—the role of a master theoretician on the faculty, he always made it very clear to his students that economic theory does not have its value in itself. Rather, he always demonstrated the very practical use of economic reasoning for solving everyday problems and issues in society. Fehl transferred this straightforward approach also to the field of economic policy. The anthology “Dimensionen des Wettbewerbs” (“Dimensions of Competition”) which he edited together with Karl von Delhaes in 1997—his last major publication—frames the interaction of competition, entrepreneurial and society’s institutions in a very realistic way and demonstrates the role of these factors for the design of alternative economic systems (Fehl and von Delhaes 1997).

Ulrich Fehl’s intellectual interests, however, expanded far beyond economics and covered natural science, history, philosophy and theology. For instance, Fehl was a connoisseur of Martin Luther’s works. He loved to involve his students in witty discussions on history in front of a large map of Germany which for years used to hang on the wall of his office. Writings such as his essay on the issue of “just” pricing (Fehl 1989) or another on the relationship of thermodynamics to social order and innovation processes (Fehl 1983) reflect his ability to connect economic thought with reasoning in ethics or natural science. His broad knowledge together with his crystal-clear style of writing and teaching gave his scientific work its unique twist.

Ulrich Fehl’s numerous contributions to journals and anthologies are rather dispersed. For easier access, Kerber and Schreiter presented a collection of Ulrich Fehl’s most important contributions to economic theory on the occasion of his 65th birthday (Kerber and Schreiter 2004). A summary of his work on capital theory was published in this journal on the occasion of his 70th birthday (Engelhard 2009). Ulrich Fehl’s scientific legacy should remain inspiring for Austrian economics long after his passing.

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