

**Title: David Colander: polite transgressor**

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Abstract: This paper considers the contribution to the economics discipline, and specific implications for economics teaching, of three pieces by David Colander, all of which attempted to re-set economists' thinking about how economics is done, is perceived, and is discussed. All three pieces have been highly influential in economics, particularly in shaping understanding of the term 'mainstream economics' and how that relates to two other commonly used categories: 'Neo-Classical Economics', and 'heterodox economics'. The paper argues that Colander's contributions contain important messages for economics teachers about their treatment of history in economics, the importance of classification and understanding the role and construction of categories in Economics. Overall, Colander's work is evaluated as being transgressive, albeit polite.

Keywords: classification, mainstream economics, neo-classical economics, heterodox economics, history of thought

JEL classifications: A14, A20, A31, B20, B49, B50

## **David Colander: polite transgressor<sup>i</sup>**

It is an honor to have been invited to reflect on a selection of David Colander's influential contributions to economics. In this piece, three works by Colander are discussed, all of which demonstrate the breadth of his contribution. The first is an article in which he (re)announces the death of Neo-Classical Economics. The second, developing the first, is an article co-authored with Richard P.F. Holt and J. Barkley Rosser, in which they sketch the changing face of mainstream economics. Also written with Holt and Rosser, the third is a book of interviews with cutting-edge economists, which provides an extra evidential base for the second article's claims. Collectively, the three pieces attempted to re-set economists' thinking about how economics is done, is perceived, and is discussed. The paper examines some of their implications, on the role of history in Economics; the importance of classification and understanding the role and construction of categories; and the teaching of Economics.

The paper concludes with a discussion of how David Colander might be classified. In an insightful earlier article paying tribute to Colander, his co-authors Holt and Rosser (2018) described him as an 'economist watcher'; however, my view is that Colander might be described as a watchman, or transgressor.

### **The Death of Neoclassical Economics (2000)**

*The Death of Neoclassical Economics* was an address Colander made in his capacity as President of the History of Economics Society, published in the Society's journal. In it, Colander made several claims about Neo-Classical Economics (hereafter NCE) and its relation to modern Economics. Specifically, he argued that NCE refers to the material

developed in the so-called marginal revolution, developed later by Samuelson and others. Crucially, as the article's title suggests, Colander also (re-)announced<sup>ii</sup> that since around the 1940s, NCE had been dead, at least in terms of its being the basis for cutting-edge work. Colander's argument was cautious, and made clear that NCE was in fact not completely dead, particularly in teaching.

According to Colander, NCE comprises a core set of elements, including the focus on static allocation of resources, aided by marginal trade-offs. Underpinning these is utilitarianism, an approach embodied by far-sighted rational individuals, who are the key unit of analysis, and who are, via price mechanisms, co-ordinated in general equilibrium.

Further, Colander considered the abstract nature of NCE *as a category*, i.e., as part of organising thinking in Economics. Good categories, he argued, should 1) be simple and clear; 2) feel intuitive, natural, and acceptable to class members; 3) work well over time; 4) be descriptive; and 5) have a consistent definition. Based on those five criteria, whilst Colander accepted that NCE could remain useful in describing a set of ideas in the history of Economics, otherwise he argues that term 'neoclassical' should die (129). In particular, Colander argued that NCE failed to meet his fourth criterion for a good category: it offers a misleading and unhelpful description of the current mainstream, hindering its understanding and development. Colander complained that, too often, current mainstream Economics is equated with NCE, partly because it makes for easy contrasts, a mistake he confessed himself (130).

Colander draws several contrasts between NCE and current mainstream thinking in economic research, such as a greater understanding of people's actual behavior, rather than assuming

far-sighted rationality; utility being deployed mainly for pedagogic reasons; and work on multiple equilibria. Methodologically, Colander cites work on set theory, showing a shift away from a focus on calculus; complexity approaches challenging methodological individualism; and a greater use of models built to achieve specific purposes rather than purely using general equilibrium approaches. For Colander (139), what unites the current mainstream is a commitment to modelling, organized around, what Solow (1997) calls, a loose-fitting positivism. He advocates for the term ‘New Millenium Economics’ to capture this new activity and new approach, on which he elaborated in the other two pieces discussed here.

### **The changing face of mainstream economics (2004)**

Colander and co-authors Richard Holt and Barkley Rosser (hereafter CHR 2004a) developed many of Colander (2000)’s themes. The article was published in a journal– *The Review of Political Economy* – popular among the community of ‘heterodox’ economists, who were its main intended audience and on whom the article’s influence has seemingly been profoundest.

CHR (2004a) re-confirmed the death of Neo-Classical Economics, distinguishing it from the mainstream, and offering another view of what constitutes the mainstream. CHR (2004a) argued that mainstream Economics has changed and now no longer adheres strictly to “the holy trinity of rationality, selfishness and equilibrium”, having moved to “a more eclectic position of purposeful behaviour, enlightened self-interest and sustainability” (485).

Complexity is central to the article in two principal ways. First, it describes the Economics profession as a complex system. Complex systems are changing, “too complicated to be fully

understood by agents in the system or researchers studying the system” (485), nor understandable through first principles. Complex systems also feature variegated and changeable agents. Accordingly, “conventional economists often hold a variety of views simultaneously” (487). Therefore, Economics should not be considered in static terms, an approach “*most* heterodox criticisms of the profession have taken” (486,emphasis added).

Change in Economics has many drivers, including technological developments such as non-linear and agent-based modelling, many of which come from outside the discipline. These techniques lead to possibilities that challenge disciplinary norms. For example, agent-based models allow heterogeneous agents and multiple equilibria to be explored. These ideas and techniques must be developed by individuals, often younger researchers (even ‘heterodox’ ones) working at the edge of the discipline. Institutions, such as the Santa Fe Institute, give important weight to the new ideas. Also, key individuals are crucial because they allow ‘edge’ ideas to get picked up by elites, who may have helped establish the orthodoxy but are critical of it. Colander, Holt and Rosser highlight Thomas Sargent as someone who had existing credibility within the discipline, and whose adoption of complexity theory was significant in propagating its application in Economics. Eventually, they argue, “[a]t any point in time, and especially by the time that the term becomes generally used, a large part of the mainstream profession disagrees with important dimensions of what is then thought of as orthodoxy” (491).

Developing Colander (2000), CHR (2004a) identifies several emergent strands of the new mainstream, all of which have already sufficiently challenged the previous orthodoxy, to claim the mainstream is no longer synonymous with those older ideas. They cite evolutionary, ecological, psychological, and complexity economics as changing how economics thinks

about, respectively, institutions, nature, rationality, and general equilibrium. Further, they cite computer simulations, experimental methods, and new econometric techniques as re-shaping empirical enquiry in economists. Overall, cutting-edge economic research ('the edge') shows Economics is pluralist, albeit "loosely held together by its modelling approach to economic problems" (487). Moreover, "[o]ur view is that the current elite are relatively open minded when it comes to new ideas, but quite closed minded when it comes to alternative methodologies" (493).

A third influential contribution of the paper is defining Economics in terms of sociological, as well as intellectual, elements typically used to define schools of thought. Thus, mainstream Economics comprises whatever theoretical and methodological ideas "the elite in the profession finds acceptable", that is, viewed "as intellectually sound and worth working on" by "the leading economists in the top graduate schools". They claim this definition has currency and is not a "historically determined school" (490).

Finally, what has become arguably the most controversial and influential element of the CHR (2004a) is its treatment of heterodox Economics, something "usually defined in reference to orthodox, meaning to be 'against orthodox,' and defines itself in terms of what it is not, rather than what it is." (491). Importantly, consistent with their discussion of the mainstream, CHR (2004a) identify a sociological aspect of heterodoxy, for instance being unable to gain access to specific important channels of funding. Significantly, because CHR opened the possibility to have non-orthodox mainstream, heterodoxy then looks different, "being both non-orthodox and non-mainstream" (544).

### **The changing face of economics (2004)**

The themes of Colander (2000) and CHR (2004a) are developed and somewhat grounded in the semi-structured interviews conducted by Colander, Holt and Rosser with nine economists (hereafter, CHR 2004b). They describe their interviewees as ‘cutting-edge’ economists with “interesting histories” (21) who have been doing significant, innovative, and leading work in the new mainstream identified by CHR (2004a). These economists are mainly from a different generation of those interviewed by Snowden and Vane (1999), and therefore have different reference points; most obviously, to the Vietnam War and social movements of the 1960s, rather than to World War II and post-war reconstruction. Conscious perhaps of the power of established elite figures, the book’s final two interviewees are Kenneth Arrow and Paul Samuelson.

Supporting the notion of a heterodoxy (defined as opposition to orthodoxy) within the mainstream, many of the interviewees express disquiet with how Economics is done, often concerning an over-reliance on mathematics. Deirdre McCloskey objects to the “stupid attempt to turn economics into a branch of, not the engineering department, but the math department” at Chicago by Lucas, Becker, et al (31). Binmore sums up this objection: “I think you have to have some mathematical training to count as being educated at all...But in retrospect, the exaggerated respect for mathematical skills...was a bad thing” (CHR 2004b, 74). This objection was raised many times by Colander, for instance in Colander (2000) and his co-authored report on economics teaching (Colander and McGoldrick 2009).

Another theme connecting CHR (2004a) and the interviews in CHR (2004b) is that being a figure on the cutting edge can be challenging, “especially for those whose proclivity is toward attacking, rather than working within the existing field” (2004a, 496), a comment

aimed mainly at heterodox economists. Furthermore, Binmore, who characterises the people in the book as “eccentrics” (73) describes how “...all the time I was being denounced by behavioural economists for defending backwards induction, I was simultaneously in trouble with game theorists for attacking it” (54). However, these interviewees were driven by a desire to effect change, and an unwillingness to accept things as they are. For Gintis: “...I can assure you that there is not a moment when I do economics, or whatever I do, that I’m not thinking about how this is going to make a better world” (87).

## **Discussion**

This section considers some of the main themes that, in my view, are present in the three contributions discussed. Given the *journal* in which this paper appears and given Colander’s numerous significant interventions on the teaching of economists (*inter alia*, Colander and Klamer 1987; Colander 2007; Colander and McGoldrick 2009; Colander et al. 2009, Colander 2015), some implications of the three pieces for teaching economics will be explored.

### ***History(ies) matters***

One key message of all three contributions discussed here is that histories matter, be they of economies, the Economics discipline, or of individual economists. They affect our understanding of the past, the present and, crucially shape the future, so it is important to get them ‘right’.

History is an important feature of the discipline as a complex system. As CHR (2004a) note, old ideas get recycled and reinvented. Of course, some do not, and others get altered, such that their original meaning gets obscured; and yet others that were not adopted in their original context may be more acceptable later, perhaps presented using different modes of communication. The interviews in CHR (2004b) also illustrate the concept of equifinality: different paths leading to the same outcome. The interviewees are in similarly influential positions but traversed the discipline in very different ways. For example, Herbert Gintis was a Marxist who embraced experimentalism and complexity. Indeed, for the interviews, a willingness to explore and change one's mind is an important trait. At a system level, these changes by individuals, and the interactions between them, can drive systems to places often far from what might have been thought of as their equilibrium. One therefore must build such possibilities into our thinking and remain vigilant, either for new theoretical developments or in areas of policy (see Dow 2009).

Colander has been a leading proponent of the method of exploring life histories via interviews, both with leading economists (CHR 2004b) and budding scholars (Colander and Klamer 1987; Colander 2007). These oral accounts tease out the respondents' deeper thoughts and their interactions in academia or in policymaking (Jullien 2018), and allow aspects to be explored, such as the psychological dimensions of being an economist, and their agency in choosing one path over another. Crucially, they allow us to learn (the economists' story of) how they developed, avoid a static view of the individual and hence the wider community. The accounts in CHR (2004a), Snowden and Vane (1999), Bowmaker (2010), Arestis and Sawyer (2001) illuminate how economists navigate the discipline. Such interviews also show the importance of supportive and inspiring teachers and advisors (see Mearman, et al. 2022). Simultaneously, they demystify these prestigious economists, who recognise the role of

chance in their own professional lives. Frank captures this sentiment well, saying, “I think of my career as a sequence of unplanned accidents” (111). In complex systems these chance events can have large impacts in specific contexts. As teachers, reminding students of the contingency of their lifepaths can be valuable, especially for those whose outcomes are worse than expected.

Also, in terms of teaching Economics and thinking like an economist, two main implications might be drawn from Colander’s emphasis on history. The first is about diversity of method and evidence, the value of which is demonstrated by Colander repeatedly via his employment of life histories, a genuinely qualitative form of data collection and analysis. Second, economic history and history of thought matter; and students ought to understand these, not least as in recognising old ideas that might still be valuable, and via better understanding of past ideas, creating better conditions for progress in Economics.

At an event at the 2009 ASSA meetings organised by Colander, in response to a question about whether the financial crisis meant Keynes, Marx or Minsky should be taught more, one contributor asserted that ‘we shouldn’t allow a once-in-a-75-year event to change what we teach’. This comment downplayed the frequency of financial crises, seemed dismissive of alternatives, and perhaps betrayed an unwillingness to change. Colander’s reaction to this event is unknown, but elsewhere, Colander et al. (2009)’s analysis of the financial crisis “and the systemic failure of the economics profession” (250) suggests he disagreed. Further, Holt and Rosser (2018, 549) note Colander “mourned that the educational environment was now unlikely to produce ... economists ... all of whom exhibited a broad and historical knowledge”. This urging to economists to engage more with history, and with historically correct definitions, is revisited below in the consideration of Neo-Classical Economics.

### *Classification matters*

Colander's work has influenced profoundly the understanding and use of the categories neo-classical, mainstream, and heterodox economics. Before considering this impact, it should be noted that his critical arguments about classification *per se* are also important. Colander (2000, 128) recognizes that even if categories feel 'natural', how things are currently arranged is serendipitous, but also have been arranged by groups of economists, and members of the class will largely determine whether the term will persist. Like Hodgson's recent (2019) work on heterodox economics, Colander argues that a classification that has too many different definitions will not last long. Colander also acknowledges the role of power in arriving at definitions, their use, and their persistence. In these ways, Colander echoes the interdisciplinary work of Bowker and Star (1999), who distinguish between *classical* and *modern* categories. Whilst classical categories are fixed, certain and may be regarded as having a natural state, modern categories are flexible, fuzzy, and constructed, for political purposes. Thus, whilst the content of classifications matter, one must also consider their nature and purpose.

One such purpose might be for the psychological benefit of the individual or social benefit of a group of economists. As do other collections of interviews, CHR (2004b) show the importance of self-labelling. As already alluded to, the economists interviewed often enjoyed the role of outsider. Robert Frank exemplifies this: "If I do have a trait that's different from more traditional economists, it is that I'm more disquieted when I see something that I think should be one way and it's a different way. I feel more troubled by that than many other people seem to be" (110). Similar sentiments can be found in various contributions to the

interview collections in Snowden and Vane (1999) and in Mearman et al (2019)'s conversations with heterodox economists. Interestingly, the label heterodox is one that is simultaneously chosen by some economists but rejected by others in the same group (cf Fullbrook; Darity) and held to different degrees (Mearman, 2011). Notably, in CHR (2004b), Norgaard, when asked if ecological economics is 'terribly heterodox', says: "Yes, I hope so" (224) but also says "I try to be a constructive dissenter" (240).

In teaching terms, it is important to help students get classifications right. Here, in my view, can be seen a link to Colander's overarching approach to Economics: Colander's classifications of neo-classical, mainstream and heterodox economics are *realytic* (Colander and Lerner 1980, vii), i.e., as being both realistic and analytic. They are grounded empirically and seek to reflect the real messiness of each object. Colander accepted that categories were necessarily simplifications but argued against over-simplification, in categorization and in modelling.

Moreover, thinking about why those classifications exist, how and why they have been constructed, and being flexible with them are important empirical skills for economists. Data literacy is an essential research capacity for any economist to develop, and a key element of which is understanding exactly what a category means, how it is measured, and why it was constructed. As Bowker and Star (1999) illustrate, the fact that a category exists means that it has already been designated as valuable, by someone, group, or institution. It is important for a data literate economist to understand all these dimensions of a metric before deploying it.

The paper now turns to three specific categories on which the three pieces discussed constitute a significantly influential contribution to our understanding of Economics. First,

‘Neo-Classical Economics’, ‘mainstream Economics’ and the relation between them are explored, followed by ‘heterodox economics’.

### *Is Neo-Classical Economics dead?*

In papers that cite Colander (2000) and CHR (2004a), commentators accept Colander’s argument that one must be careful not to lazily equate NCE and mainstream Economics. Davis (2006) agrees NCE no longer dominates modern Economics, and Lawson (2013) agrees that one possible course would be to jettison the term altogether. Of course, Colander was explicit that NCE was *not* dead, not least living on in aspects of practice, such as teaching (Colander 2005). Colander (2009a) himself lamented the persistent influence of DSGE models and could claim that the diversity of modelling approach within ecological economics supports his view of a pluralist mainstream. Moreover, he was cautious in his claims about the pace of change, and the processes by which change might happen.

However, opinions differ on Colander’s view of the relation between NCE and mainstream Economics. Bemoaning an inconsistency among previous commentators, Colander (2000, 133) states: “Either modern economics is part of neoclassical economics or it isn’t”. Colander claims modern Economics is fundamentally different from NCE, being more eclectic and having a different world view. In response, Dequech (2007-8) argues that NCE can still be *part of* the mainstream. Subsequent debate, particularly in critical circles, has been about the extent to which NCE remains essential to the modern mainstream Economics.

Others have argued against the *separation* of Neo-Classical and mainstream Economics, claiming that the former retains a significant underlying influence on the latter. Stilwell,

echoing others, still sees a Neo-Classical economic core to the mainstream: operating “rather like a gravitational force” (191), through its underlying logic and principles. For instance, Shaikh (2019) describes mainstream Economics as a *perfectionist* approach – comparing reality with ideal outcomes rather than beginning by taking reality as it is. Arguably, even in behavioral and informational economics, the utility-maximizing Neo-Classical agent lurks in the background, as a yardstick for actual behavior (cf. Akerlof and Schiller 2016). In contrast to Norgaard’s positioning of ecological economics as ‘terribly heterodox’, some ecological economists have argued that some of its strands retain strongly Neo-Classical elements, such as a commitment to general equilibrium theory (Pirgmaier 2017). Consequently, critics view NCE as alive, or echoing Fine (2010), as a zombie – undead, still walking among us, slow-moving but capable of biting.

### ***What is heterodox economics?***

In terms of heterodox economics, the influence of Colander’s intervention is clear, not least by the number of contributions contesting his claims, first, as discussed above, about the definition of the mainstream, and second, rejecting the characterization of heterodox economics laid out in CHR (2004a). Certainly, that paper has become a standard reference text for those engaging with the definition of the mainstream, heterodox economics, and the relation between the two (see Lawson 2006; Fine and Milonakis 2009; Lee 2009; Dobusch and Kapeller 2012; Mirowski & Nik-Khah 2017; and Hodgson 2019). More recently, Reinke (2024)’s empirical study uses what he calls *Colander’s Edge* to help classify and map power relations in German Economics. The work has been cited outside the discipline in commentaries on Economics (Maesse 2015).

Many of the arguments of Colander (2000) and CHR (2004a, 2004b) have been conditionally accepted. For instance, Davis (2008) accepts their proposition of a heterodoxy within the mainstream. Of particular importance has been the distinction made between intellectual and sociological dimensions of heterodoxy (Dequech 2007-8), and its acknowledgement of the importance of power relations in the Economics discipline, something acknowledged by CHR (2004a) and which unites the notionally heterodox interviewees in Mearman et al. (2019).

More controversial has been CHR's attempt to break down distinctions between mainstream and heterodox economics, for instance by claiming, "The edge of economics is that part of mainstream economics that is critical of orthodoxy, and that part of heterodox economics that is taken seriously by the elite of the profession" (CHR 2004a, 492), i.e., that to some extent the groups overlap and can converse. Second, though, CHR (2004a, 492) state, "Often, the fundamental intellectual content of a heterodox school is its rejection of orthodoxy, or at least major elements of orthodoxy".

The qualifier 'often' is important but has inspired work to investigate whether this claim is true. For example, among respondents to a questionnaire distributed at a heterodox conference scored on average 82% on a sliding scale that 'I consider myself a heterodox economist', and scored 13% when asked if they consider themselves mainstream (Mearman 2011). Interviews with heterodox economists do not identify rejection of mainstream as a defining characteristic, even if they mainly disagree with it. Further, several efforts have sought to define and advocate for heterodox economics as a positive project, emphasising its contributions to theorising (eg. Kvangraven and Alves 2019). As well as attention to power relations, the interviewees emphasise realisticness, and advocacy of plurality as defining aspects (Mearman, et al. 2023).

What lessons from teaching can be taken from Colander's treatment of Neo-Classical and heterodox economics, in addition to their reinforcing the need for care in categorization?

Why should teachers or students care, for instance, whether neo-classical Economics is dead?

One simple reason is that depth of understanding matters, particularly if a modern theoretical concept implicitly reflects another. For example, choice and strategy imply the broader

principle of individualism. A belief in the neutrality of concepts could be considered naïve.

Another reason for caring is that, to paraphrase Keynes, Economics teachers are slaves of defunct economic ideas, which act as intellectual anchor points, so that even if the teachers do not believe them consciously, they are revealed in their teaching.

Additionally, where possible, unnecessary barriers ought to be broken down, partly because they often lack empirical grounds (see Dow 1990) and because they limit conversation. As an extension to that, approaches that too easily dismiss alternative, sometimes fundamentally different approaches ought also be avoided. In a complex system, students must understand that one cannot rely on one set of tools – or even a scientific approach – to address a practical problem, and practice that. To think like an economist means having many tools at their disposal (Nelson 2011). The new UK Economics subject benchmark statement now reflects this approach: “Various interpretations – sometimes fundamentally different – of commonly observed economic phenomena exist, and hence explanations may be contested” (QAA 2023). Such an approach would support economists addressing big questions, as advocated by Colander and McGoldrick (2009) and more recently by Deaton (2024), and buck the trend of Economics of “research [directed] toward clever, but relatively unimportant, publishable articles” (Colander 2009, 71).

As Colander understood, at the root of differences between approaches are often differences of vision (see also Heilbroner 1990; Dow 1996). Indeed, this claim is central to CHR (2004a,b), particularly regarding complexity as a different worldview from that underpinning neo-classical Economics. Gintis captures this as: “The big thing [in terms of changes in Economics] is the abandoning of the neoclassical [GE] model as the basic way you think about the economy” (CHR 2004b, 100). In teaching, understanding the underlying vision an economist has can be brought out, and differences in these worldviews can be explored, even when they appear incommensurable.

Moreover, another important lesson from Colander’s approach for economists was that effective communication matters. Colander understood the audience he had in front of him and adapted what he said to that group: contrast the changing face of *mainstream* economics (2004a), aimed mainly at heterodox economists, with the changing face of economics (2004b), which had a broader target. Mode of engagement also matters. As Holt and Rosser (2018) express it, for Colander it was better to use honey than vinegar if one wanted to facilitate dialogue. Being open and avoiding unnecessary confrontation makes one more likely to be successful and creates opportunities for growth. As Colander (2009b, 67-8) expressed it: “Seeing the mainstream’s rejection of their ideas as due to the mainstream’s closed-mindedness may make heterodox economists feel better, but it is not a way to open up dialog between mainstream and heterodoxy”.

### **Conclusion: how might David Colander be categorized?**

In this paper, three contributions from David Colander have been considered, all of which are significant in shaping the discipline. Colander’s work has changed how Economics is

discussed and thought about, particularly via his historical approach, and by challenging economists to be clearer in their thinking about common categories. For a deep, critical, and self-aware understanding of Economics, attention ought to be paid to the origins of concepts, and to their nature. These injunctions are important for Economics teachers, not least in encouraging them to consider their own practice. Such lessons are important ones to be passed on to students too, as keen as teachers and students alike are to get on with learning and applying theory.

As much as his work itself, though, I admire the courage of Colander's approach; being prepared to take risks in calling out the profession before he had *made it*, to state his case and to follow his own path. Colander repeatedly occupied the liminal space, operating in places considered somewhat marginal, such as the history of thought and Economics education, efforts that have helped deservedly raise their profile. He attempted to shift Economics in what he considered a more productive direction, for instance into complexity (Colander 2000; CHR 2004a, 2004b; other references) and to develop a Post-Walrasian approach to Economics (Colander 1996, 2006).

Reflecting his own background, publishing early work on inflation with Abba Lerner (1980), Colander worked across boundaries, for instance by working with Holt and Rosser, two economists who had themselves been liminal. Rosser does not fit neatly into mainstream/heterodox because his "book on chaos theory had established him as a legitimate modeller and an economist to be taken seriously" and yet "he was rather disdainful of [orthodox economics]" (CHR 2004b, viii). CHR (2004a) was talking to heterodox economists and published in a heterodox journal. Colander often ventured into places where one would

not expect to find such a high-profile economist, such as conferences on teaching, and on pluralism.

In their piece honoring Colander, Holt and Rosser (2018) ask how they would define him. Given our discussion of classification, it seems apposite to do so again. Holt and Rosser consider various options, including gadfly, court jester, nudger, and dissenter, eventually rejecting them in favour of ‘economist watcher’, to capture his eagerness to observe economists in their everyday lives. However, perhaps Holt and Rosser’s characterisation underplays what Colander was doing. He was not merely watching: he was seeking to influence. In the abstract to CHR (2004a) the authors describe the change in Economics they see, as a *fundamental shift*. They are trying to turn the dial. Thus, mainstream, heterodox, and Neo-Classical Economics are not merely descriptive categories, they are desired outcomes. An alternative characterization not too far from Holt and Rosser’s might be *watchman*: someone employed to look after a building or town, particularly at night; and someone ready to take action to protect their charge. Perhaps this fits better the active Colander who, unlike the watchman, was concerned with not just the nocturnal – what McCloskey (1983) calls the official method of Economics – but the diurnal too, the actual practice of economists, and asks them to consider what they are doing. Similarly, it invites Economics teachers to reflect on what, and how, they are teaching.

Even this definition, though, may not do. As discussed throughout this paper, a key feature of Colander’s work and approach is as one who, without ignoring or not recognizing boundaries, is prepared to cross them, straddle them, reach across them, at the same time inviting us to question the usefulness and purpose of the boundary. Colander can be seen, in my view, as a transgressor, albeit a polite one.

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<sup>i</sup> This paper has benefitted from editing by Esther Pickering. The usual disclaimer applies.

<sup>ii</sup> Colander acknowledges (pp. 132-3) that various people declared NCE dead, including Hicks (1983).