

ASSESSED WORK FOR FUB *ALTERNATIVE ECONOMICS*

I've been keen in this first introductory course in political economy to emphasise the centrality of value and different ways of valuing. But whilst value has been our main concern and epic of discussion, the aim of the course was also to distinguish political economy from economics by showing how matters of public, collective or political interest are subject to different logics and mechanisms to that of private individual interests. With these two sets of concerns at the forefront of our thinking you might wish to consider the following problem as one to respond to for your assessed work.

If you choose to undertake this particular assessment it should take the following form. It should be an essay of between 1500 -2000 words in length, fully referenced and with a bibliography. The essay must begin with the exact title given below.

ESSAY TITLE

The example of the economics of the lighthouse has been used throughout the modern study of economics. The lighthouse seems to be a classic example of a public good used for private benefit; at least it seems so at first sight. Taking the lighthouse as your central object of enquiry, examine the different kinds of values a lighthouse has and to whom. In particular, discuss the political economy of the direct beneficiaries of a lighthouse and the providers of lighthouses.

GUIDANCE FOR THIS ESSAY IN PARTICULAR

This is a very specific and focused question. It is about the political economy of lighthouses, nothing else. It is not a 'compare and contrast' question. It is not a history of lighthouses question. And it is not a question about lighthouse operating policy. It is about political economy, i.e, the relationship between public and private interests and power, expressed through notions of value. So throughout your preparation, reading, writing and drafting keep reminding yourself of the focus of the essay. (This essay does not require a history of actual lighthouse use or funding). In this essay we're not looking for an exact answer or a specific response. Instead we're looking for how you approach and think about the problem of lighthouses. In that respect this essay will perhaps be more free thinking than you might have otherwise expected for a political economy essay. In a way what you are being asked to do is to take a (relatively) familiar object - a lighthouse - and to scrutinise it from as many different perspectives as might occur to you.

Take things simply and slowly. What is a lighthouse ? What are its functions and how does it work (not in the sense of 'there is a lightbulb of X Watts, which operates throughout reflecting lenses of this/that material', but in the sense of providers and users) ? Obviously a lighthouse warns in different ways of dangers. What kind of

dangers ? What kind of value does this warning have ? Can you measure those values ? What does it mean to speak of a lighthouse as a 'public good' ? What is a 'public good' ? Who are the different kinds of providers and users of lighthouses ? Does it make sense, even, to speak of "users of lighthouses" ? Is it only ships in distress that use lighthouses ? What about those not in distress, aren't they also using lighthouses ? What about that slip of the tongue - do ships use lighthouses at all ? Isn't it captains or navigators or other sea farers i.e, living human beings ? Don't forget that tourists also visit lighthouses ? So the value of lighthouses might vary between 'users' and in different seasons and even vary dramatically by different weather conditions. Similarly you might also look at the provision lighthouses. Who should pay for their construction ? The same people or institutions as those which pays for their maintenance and operation ? Can (and should) you make users pay ? Should lighthouses be built and operated out of general taxation ? Or since only communities on the coast directly benefit from them, a tax only local communities ? Or a charge on ship operators ?

There is a body of work which we did not detail during the course but which we did touch upon and which you will find very useful in thinking about this question. There is a huge literature on how to categorise different kinds of goods and services, with an elementary distinction between 'pure public goods' and 'pure private goods'. You should read and think carefully about the idea of lighthouses as some kind of 'public good'. (NB. A public good is not synonymous with what is good for the public , although there is a connection. Good/goods have quite different meanings, with the good in 'public good' meaning utility, whereas the good in 'good for the public' refers to some moral or normative benefit).

Once again we're not looking for any specific answer or response to these and related questions so much as asking you to write an essay on how you think about these issues of political economy and public good. You might find it helpful to use a map or chart of a sea area with a lighthouse just to get a sense of which communities and people are typically using lighthouses.

USEFUL LITERATURE

Available through my webpage are a collection of articles concerned with lighthouse economics plus a number of links to issues of public goods. Please use these materials but do not think that they are either exhaustive or define the field. By all means look further and don't hesitate to contact me for further material and ideas. Avoid general web-trawls and don't use randomly found websites based on a keyword search. Check that the sites that you wish to use are serious and academically reliable; if in doubt contact me.

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSED WORK

If you do not wish to be assessed through this fixed essay title you should contact me with (i) a brief statement or summary of a problem or question in political economy which you think you would like to investigate AND (ii) a suggestion as to which mode of assessment you'd like to undertake the assessment i.e, essay, post, blog, audio/video material, other form of writing, or some other mode.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE

Please submit the final draft of your work by the last Friday of June, i.e, 24th June. Submit it as a .pdf file if possible and as an attachment to an e-mail.

GUIDANCE ON ESSAY WRITING IN GENERAL

The following is guidance for those who wish to write and submit an essay for assessment.

Remember that essay, derived from the French verb "essayer" meaning 'to try' or 'to attempt', amounts to trying to offer a written piece. It is not something closed and definitive, your last word on the subject. Instead it is an attempt, at this moment, to write something meaningful about the subject. In two weeks or two months or two years' time you may have changed your mind, or changed your mind twenty times, but that is irrelevant. What matters in an essay is expressing what you think about a subject now, today.

There are, I think, essentially two ways of structuring an essay, the second of which I strongly recommend for academic work. The first way is what I'll call 'a mystery tour' in which you, the author, play detective by gathering a seemingly random collection of items (facts, for example) and you examine these one by one, paragraph by paragraph, only revealing in the conclusion the purpose, nature and result of your enquiry. The strength of this way of structuring an essay relies on the 'performance' and the denouement (or revealing) of the whole drama at the end. This way has its merits but is very difficult to pull off successfully, especially at the beginning of a scientific or academic writing career. Instead I strongly recommend the second way of structuring an essay which is to follow a basic and repeated pattern, as follows :

Interpret the title very carefully and deliberately isolating each of the title's key terms. Divide the whole essay into three sections, comprising an introduction, a middle section (main body) and a conclusion (or more accurately, concluding remarks). The introduction should identify and explain very briefly the key terms of the title; it should say what you propose to do i.e, what steps you'll take in the main body; what kinds of things you'll draw upon (theories, concepts, events, data and so on), and indicate in broad terms the conclusion that you'll be coming to. Then in the main body you take

each element or step that you've already identified and set the details out, dedicating a paragraph or two to each main point or step. You can treat each step by following this rubric : (i) make a claim, (ii) follow the claim immediately with some supporting evidence, and then (iii) explain the significance of this claim and evidence to the development of your whole essay. Repeat this three-fold move in the main body of the essay. Finally in the concluding section bring each of those sub-sections (iii) together; where does all that leave you?

In this second approach the hard thinking work takes place before you put pen to paper. In this approach the essay becomes the distillation of your earlier thinking where you put down on paper the key elements of your thinking. If you've taken notes or jotted down ideas as you've done the course or the various readings then you can refine and reshuffle these to form the first draft of your essay. Of course sketching out a quick essay plan can be invaluable – what do I want to say, how can I say it, what shall I start with, where do I want to end, what sequence of points is best ? Sketch out a couple of plans before writing a draft.

Don't spend much time on formatting the essay, we don't want anything fancy. We're interested in your word and conceptual skills not your graphic skills. So ensure the following : (i) Use the exact time given. (ii) Organise the essay into three principal sections; introduction, main body, conclusion. (iii) Try to avoid sub-headings and sub-sections. In an essay of 1500-2000 words just one level of sub-division, as just noted, is usually sufficient. (iv) Write in full sentences and paragraphs. Avoid bullet points and simple listing. (v) Include references and bibliography in a recognised style. (vi) The draft for submission should be double-spaced with an 11 or 12 point font, preferably Arial or other sans serif font. (vii) Include your name and contact e-mail at the end.

Incidentally if you want quite superb examples of essays, indeed amongst the original examples of the essay form, then I strongly recommend that you read any of Michel de Montaigne's essays. Writing in the sixteenth century, de Montaigne's subjects are as diverse as "On cruelty", "On vehicles", "The Art of conversation", "On cannibals" and 'On the art education of children," and so much more. If you read him carefully you'll not only detect his style but also the techniques that he used to address each subject in a more or less coherent manner. By the way, I'm not at all suggesting that you copy his style for this political economy essay.

By the way, to get a sense of scale, be aware that these notes come to about 1900 words.

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