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“打开经济学之门”
原版注释基础读本

经济学基础

(注释版)

**Economics:
the Basics**

(英) 托尼·克利弗 著

原理篇



经济科学出版社
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策划人语

《“打开经济学之门”原版注释基础读本》系列丛书是经济科学出版社适应新形势下高校双语教学需求的精心策划之作。

秉承经济科学出版社“繁荣经济科学，宣传服务财政”的办社宗旨，丛书的策划者从中国读者的英文阅读实际水平出发，从海量的国外教材和教辅书中挑选了广义经济学的八本入门读本，内容涵盖经济学、管理学、金融学、营销学等门类，编写体例分为原理篇、概念篇和人物篇三大类，原理篇旨在介绍该学科最基础的理论框架；概念篇则一一介绍该学科最核心的概念；同时，丛书的另外一大创新是：还尝试着加入了人物篇，例如，《管理学基础——人物篇》介绍了自文艺复兴时期以来的50位著名的管理学大师的生平和思想。丛书力图通过原理、概念、人物的多角度、多层面呈现，为初涉经济学领域的青年学子和所有非经济学专业的读者们立体地勾画出一幅完整的学术图景，而且是原汁原味的呈现。

《“打开经济学之门”原版注释基础读本》系列丛书被设计成开放式结构：我们将根据读者的反馈逐渐地出版更多的切合中国读者需求的好作品。丛书知识性和趣味性并重，英文通俗易懂，适合大学本科低年级学生、高职高专学生阅读。

丛书的初衷是出版中文翻译版本，然而在漫长的试译、翻译、校译过程中，一方面是深感语言传达的艰难；另一方面是考虑到时至21世纪，中国读者的英文阅读水平早已经超越了出版者的预期，读者对译文标准性的挑剔也成为出版者的新高度，从而逐渐萌发了出版注释版的想法：为读者提供全英文的读本，只加上少量的中文注解。通过与国外出版者艰难的谈判，最终成功地说服了外方，获

得了在中国出版英文注释版的独家授权。为此，我们付出了超出预期好几倍的辛劳。

然而，这仅仅只是开始，读者的接受和喜欢才是我们最终的目标。希望读者喜欢我们的创意，为我们提供更多的创意！

2011年11月

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WEALTH AND POVERTY

财富与贫困

Planet Earth is a unique and immensely rich supporter of biological life-forms.

The most successful life-form is, of course, *humankind* and it has exploited the planet's richness to spread rapidly across the globe-and it has also, for some, developed lifestyles that are unprecedentedly sophisticated and luxurious.

Dominant though the species has become, however, two important observations must be made:

- First, however richly endowed the Earth may be, its resources are not limitless. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the exponential growth in human activity is damaging to the planet's ecology. As more resources are commandeered for human consumption so not only do other life-forms lose out in direct competition but also there is the danger that future generations of humankind itself will be deprived.
- Second, just as other species have been unable to compete for the control of Earth's resources against the dominant life-form, so within humankind there are great differences in the ability of some to compete and succeed. A relatively small minority of the peoples on the globe enjoy great riches. A very much larger fraction of humankind survives in comparative poverty.

Unlike primitive plants and animals, however, what makes

humankind different from all other species on the planet is our capacity for choice. We are not driven solely by instinct to the ends we find ourselves occupying. We can *choose* our own destiny. Acting on our own as individuals or acting together in society, we are blessed with the capacity to influence future outcomes.

经济学曾一直被描述为
一门选择的科学。

Economics has been described as the science of choice.

In the face of limited resources, human society has evolved systems of decision-making that choose whose wants are to have priority, in what manner resources are to be exploited and whether-in the end-we make guns or bread and butter.

Whichever decision-making system society employs, however, it is in the nature of economics that the answers it comes up with cannot please all of the people, all of the time. Because fundamental issues and disagreements are at stake here, they have excited the passions of humankind throughout history. Revolutions have erupted, wars have been won and lost and demonstrations continue to this day in various cities and nations of the world about the proper distribution, use and abuse of the fruits of the planet.

This text attempts to study these things dispassionately, to analyse and achieve an objective understanding of the basic economic questions that concern us all: how wealth is created, how it is distributed amongst us and what is sacrificed in the process.

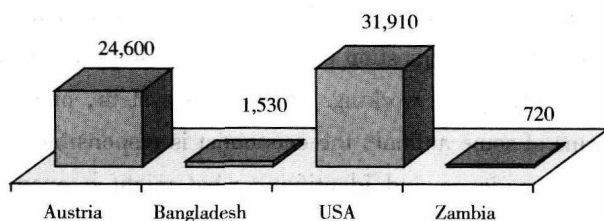
We begin by considering market, command and traditional forms of economic organisation. In later chapters, we go on to study the role of prices, the nature of production, and issues of inflation, unemployment and international trade. In so doing we adopt the economists' rational, scientific approach to our subject matter but-as I hope you will see-throughout this analysis we never stray far from issues of topical and controversial interest that economics is designed to illuminate.

In this respect, consider the criticism implied earlier.

Some observers allege that we have squandered the riches of the Earth in creating inequitable opulence—catering for the greed of a few powerful parties whilst ignoring the needs of all other inhabitants of the planet. Is this true? If so, how has it come about? And what, if anything, should be done about it?

In order to address these questions, it is worth pointing out at the outset the difference between matters of fact and those of opinion. That is, between questions of POSITIVE ECONOMICS, which can be answered by resort to hard evidence and those of NORMATIVE ECONOMICS, which require the application of value judgement. Modern economists attempt to re-define most questions so that they may be couched in terms of the former, avoiding the latter (or at least identifying their own biases) so that the reader can make up his/her own mind.

That the Earth's riches are consumed more by some than by others can be quickly demonstrated. Consider an A to Z of the world's nations: One quick measure of relative wealth is the purchasing power of the average citizen in, say, Austria compared to Zambia; Bangladesh compared to the USA. The World Bank gives the data as shown in Figures 1.1 and 1.2 for the year 2000.



**Figure 1.1 US \$ average income per capita
(purchasing power parity)**

Another yardstick would be to compare the consumption of primary energy sources of the average person in each country—since this is a direct measure of how much of a basic and essential resource (such as oil) is being used up by differing peo-

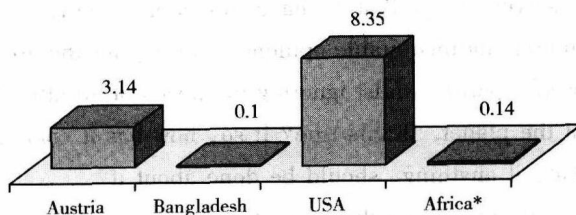


Figure 1.2 Primary energy consumed per person (tons of oil equivalent)

Note

Figures for Zambia are unavailable. The average for all African countries except Algeria, Egypt and the Republic of South Africa given instead.

ples.

These are crude measures. Many more sophisticated and more accurate surveys can be quoted but the basic point is made: there exist great extremes of wealth and poverty amongst the peoples of the planet.

分配不平等的现象的出现，是实证经济学中非常困难的一个问题。

How such an unequal distribution has come about is a much more difficult question of positive economics. It is, in fact, an inquiry that will run all through this book as an undercurrent that flows behind the various theories and analyses which form the backbone of this subject.

What, if anything, should be done about global inequality is, of course, not a question of positive economics at all. Like a scientist studying the workings of the solar system, or the internal organs of some animal, the economist is responsible for publishing the evidence and identifying what might happen if you make this change or that to economic systems but he/she has no more right than anyone else to say what ought to happen in this world.

It is always easy to ask important questions in economics. It is easy also to make colourful and outrageous claims about the nature and conduct of economic affairs. (Have certain people really squandered the riches of Earth?) It is not always easy, however, to give balanced, objective and accurate responses to

such questions and assertions. That is nonetheless the challenge of positive economics.

THREE DECISION-MAKING SYSTEMS

三种制定决策的系统

Let us return now to the study of decision-making systems that communities may adopt to organise their economic affairs. There are three examples.

First, consider the economic activity within a small, student-run community-such as in a university college or hall of residence. In this example, we can imagine a fairly active social life exists, perhaps led and organised by a student committee: putting on discos, arranging a regular supply of drinks and snacks, maybe on occasions inviting outside agents and artistes to come and entertain the residents.

Now contrast this with the economic life of a large town or city: an enormous range of industrial, commercial and personal services are provided-too many to briefly enumerate.

Third, at the opposite extreme, we can consider the economic organisation of a small family home where housekeeping, maintenance and family care takes place.

How is it decided in each of these communities *what* goods and services should be provided; *how* (where, when and by whom) these commodities should be produced and *who* should enjoy the benefits of their consumption? Decisions as to what is produced, and how and for whom, may be taken in very different ways in these three examples.

Small college communities where everyone knows one another can often be run very democratically-people being elected for office and then asking around what goods should be ordered, what sorts of things people want to get done, etc. An efficient CENTRAL PLANNING mechanism may evolve-the community's

wants are surveyed, passed up to the decision-making committee who then issue orders to outside suppliers or delegate production to internal groups (the bar committee, the dance organisers, etc).

In a family home, there is unlikely to be any formal election of senior officers. Most economic decisions are taken by parents and family elders and roles within the family evolve slowly according to TRADITION and the circumstances of individuals.

Most of the economic activity in a large city, however, is determined not by planning, nor by social custom but by the dictates of a free MARKET. If there is sufficient demand for a product or service then, subject to its lawful production, it will be provided. (Governments can outlaw certain trades such that supplies are severely cut back-but so long as people are willing to pay high, BLACK MARKET prices production will take place anyway. The free market can subvert government.)

These three decision-making systems introduced here can be found in operation all over the world. Their precise application in any one theatre of human activity will depend on the institutions and practices of the country concerned-some industries and some countries may demonstrate a distinct preference for one system above the rest; another economic organisation may rely on a combination of all three. Industry in almost any country will demonstrate some element of all three decision-making systems acting together but let us look for examples where each regime can be studied more or less on its own.

TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURE

传统农业

As an example of traditional practice, there is no better showcase to be found than to observe the work of the millions of

people around the world tied to subsistence agriculture. They are bound to a system that relative to other societies has seen little change over centuries.

Evidence suggests that farm workers in poor countries are not themselves resistant to change—indeed they may respond rapidly to genuine opportunities to improve their welfare—but that given the circumstances in which they find themselves, their traditional agricultural practices are in fact rational and efficient outcomes that have evolved over generations of trial and error.

What goods does such a society choose to produce? Those that experience shows to be the most reliable.

In farming some of the poorer lands on the planet, where climatic conditions may vary, where ownership of land and one's place in society is traditionally determined and where government is remote and as reliable as the wind, those who work the land tend not to take undue risks. They produce therefore what they know they can count on, using traditional technology that is home-grown and suited to the terrain.

Traditional agriculture tends to be self-sufficient because it has to be. To become dependent on a number of external suppliers in poor countries is to risk losses when they fail you. And losses in this context means not only losing crops or livestock but losing your life as well.

传统农业的自给自足特性

Social custom therefore determines much of the economic organisation that takes place in poor rural communities. What, how and for whom production takes place is decided by traditional practices that have evolved according to the particular institutions of the society in question. Within these given parameters, such economic organisation can often be highly efficient—much to the surprise of outsiders who expect to find backward or irrational production techniques.

The disadvantage of tradition, of course, is that no matter how appropriate established procedures are in their specific context, customary ways of life rarely prepare their followers to

cope well with unprecedented changes (see Box 1.1).

Box 1.1 El Salvador: a case study in the vulnerability of traditional economic practice

萨尔瓦多：一个传统经济
实践活动的案例研究

El Salvador became independent from Spain in 1839 and for some years thereafter the country remained traditionally agricultural, with high birth and death rates, a small and stable population yet with sufficient fertile land to provide for all with no great extremes of poverty or wealth.

Standards of health and education were low in the mid nineteenth century but a British diplomat's wife commented that, in contrast with the major cities of England at that time, there was nonetheless a striking *lack* of poverty in this Central American republic. Land holdings were dispersed amongst the population with all families having access to their own property or to communal land, and a diverse range of agricultural goods was produced to support domestic consumption. The economy was basically one of self-sufficiency but with limited trade and economic growth.

The latter half of the nineteenth century, however, brought accelerating change. In a time of increasing world communications and trade, a growing El Salvador elite found in common with others around the globe that there was profit to be made in promoting exports. Most importantly, they found coffee. Suddenly, the ownership of coffee plantations became the key to wealth.

Families that started plantations found ways to increase the areas under cultivation. Indian village lands, worked communally for centuries, were said to be preserving a 'backward' culture and came under threat. With no property rights recognised in law, coffee planters bought them up, displaced the inhabitants but offered only limited plantation work at pitifully low wages.

El Salvador was eventually transformed-economically, politically and socially. Coffee dominated the economy and those who did not have coffee had little else. Land owning structures, land use patterns, labour relations and the distribution of economic and political power

Continue

all changed. El Salvador is now a country where economic growth *has* occurred-though its benefits have been unequally distributed. Landless rural peoples have little control over their destinies and so the only remaining 'tradition' which dictates what occupations poor people follow, what goods they produce and how they produce them is the continuing tradition of economic powerlessness. Their choices today are in fact more limited than in the past, thanks to the institutions that have overturned earlier social custom and have re-shaped their society.

Source: Burns, Bradford 'The Modernization of Underdevelopment: El Salvador 1858 - 1931' reprinted as chapter 10 in Wilbur C. K. and Jameson K. P. , *The Political Economy of Development and Underdevelopment* McGraw-Hill 1996.

MARKET AGRICULTURE 农业市场

Contrast all of the above to agricultural organisation in modern market societies. Here, farms are typically located within a complex network of supporting suppliers and outlets in time and space, from which a wide range of inputs are purchased and to which outputs are sold. Crop farmers use formulaic combinations of fertilisers, pesticides and irrigation, employ agricultural machinery that is regularly serviced and use skilled, hired labour. In animal husbandry, there is similar dependence on bought-in feedstock and veterinary and transport services. Such farming practices are embedded in a modern, interdependent market society and they could not survive without it.

What goods modern farmers produce depend on what prices and profits they can gain from the market. Whether it be organic foodstuffs or genetically modified crops, the market-driven producer will farm that which brings in the best returns.

The production methods employed are similarly dependent on market signals-where technical progress has brought down the

price of machinery, seed varieties and/or breeding stock, the farm will be highly CAPITAL INTENSIVE. Alternatively, if the price of farm labour is cheaper, farming practices may be less capital intensive and more 'hands on'.

Finally, the rewards to farming will be divided between landowners, creditors, labourers and management according to the rates of RENT on land, INTEREST on capital, WAGES or PROFITS that rule in the market place. Certainly, if resources are not guaranteed the going market rate-whether it be a worker's wages or interest on a loan-then the resource involved, labour or capital, will seek better employment elsewhere.

Freedom to move is an essential pre-condition of any functioning market and it is a key feature of this economic system that distinguishes it from traditional and planned systems. Consumers must be free to change their purchases, and resources their employment, if the market system is to work efficiently.

MOBILITY can only be meaningful, however, if people have effective choices. If there are no alternatives then there is little freedom. Very poor people, in particular, may be unable to afford the glamorous variety of expensive products that are displayed on advertising hoardings and similarly unable to afford the upgrading of skills that might allow them to seek more rewarding employment.

For such reasons, certain governments in the past have attempted to introduce planned systems that guarantee all peoples in society access to basic essentials such as food, shelter, education and health.

PLANNED AGRICULTURE 计划农业

A system of planning in agriculture was famously practised in Soviet collective farms and Chinese communes in the latter half of the twentieth century. Huge areas of land and millions of

labourers were employed to produce targeted amounts of foods to be distributed to the nation's people at low, ADMINISTERED PRICES. Products that arrived on the shelves in the cities were those that the planners (not customers) ordered. Similarly, the type and quantity of resources employed on the farms were those that planners dictated. Private ownership of land, profit-maximising behaviour and the ability of entrepreneurs to employ labour and determine the working lives of others was prohibited. The state directed the objectives of the collective farms/communes, gave the orders as to who was working where and with whom and restricted the freedom of individuals to do otherwise. While this may seem completely alien to those raised in a world of democratic choice and economic plenty, a system which guaranteed food supplies and certain employment was extremely welcome to those who had suffered their absence.

What, how and for whom production takes place in planned systems is decided by a hierarchical organisation where last year's achievements are reviewed, tomorrow's requirements are identified and orders are given to all levels throughout the economy to coordinate production to meet the announced targets. Individual choice thus becomes subservient to the needs of the society as a whole.

The paradox, of course, is that society is made up of individuals. Thus a key disadvantage with centrally planned systems is that beyond basic needs how can senior administrators know and make provision for what every individual wants? The Soviet and Chinese COMMAND ECONOMIES additionally suffered from politically determined payment systems that destroyed incentives and ultimately entailed that national outputs and incomes could not keep up with Western standards. No nationwide examples of centrally planned systems thus survive today, although within market economies some important and fascinating case studies are still to be found (see Box 1.2).