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The Ethical Imperative of Possibilism in an Era of Despair

Review essay by George F. DeMartino and Ilene Grabel, *The Handbook of Diverse Economies*, J.K. Gibson-Graham and Kelly Dombroski, eds., Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020

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Abstract

The Handbook of Diverse Economies displays the extraordinary creativity that infuses the diverse economies project. For us, the *Handbook* demonstrates forcefully that we discover in what we don't know rather than what we do a deep reservoir of productive naivete and problem solving that might enable us to stumble toward a just, sustainable, and responsible economy, one experiment at a time. We find in diverse economies projects a parallel ethical stance grounded in the political choice to not know, and yet to try—a stance we find elaborated in the work of Albert O. Hirschman. Diverse economies practitioners presume, look for, and find ways to enact respectful, sustaining, non-exploitative human and human-non-human relationships. When a courageous appreciation of what we don't and can't know guides progressive politics, there are no limits to the initiatives awaiting enactment.

Keywords

Diverse economies; experimentation; ethics; Albert O. Hirschman's possibilism; uncertainty

Walker, there is no road,
the road is made by walking.

-- Antonio Machado, "Walker"

We approach the chance to reflect on *The Handbook of Diverse Economies* in a historical conjuncture that features a retreat by most all major political parties from the global neoliberal project that had informed economic policy choices for the better part of 50 years. Suddenly, neoliberalism and even globalism have faded as ideals even among many of its most ardent intellectual advocates. Just yesterday liberal and conservative economists were united in their support of market liberalization, most often defended by way of simplistic, reductionist neoclassical models that purported to teach us the virtues of market liberalization. Today, neoclassical thought is in disarray, and the profession has put "theory" aside while shifting abruptly to an empiricist epistemology in which the truth of the world is to be gleaned from the data rather than from axiomatic-deductive reasoning. The policy prescriptions now emerging from economics are inelegant, hesitant, and deeply context specific. Notably, the state is back as a viable actor. Even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) speaks of the viability of industrial policy and capital controls, and managed trade and financial regulation are now increasingly accepted as legitimate policy strategies. One chief consequence of this transformation is the decline of "ism" thinking (Grabel 2017, 2022): the end of the search, at least for now, of one grand, unifying model of economic practice that is presumed to be universally available, coherent, and optimal. Instead, the recent and present moment can be better captured by what Grabel (2017, xii), following Gibson-Graham (1996, 141-142), calls productive incoherence.¹

A related aspect of the turmoil in economics is equally notable. Leading economists today are speaking openly about the limits to economic science. "Uncertainty" is the new catchword (DeMartino 2022; DeMartino, Grabel, Scoones 2024). Economists suddenly seem to recognize that they cannot "know" how the economy works or what the future will bring. The epistemic iconoclasts who emphasized the limits to economic knowledge, such as Frank Knight, John Maynard Keynes, G.L.S. Shackle, Friedrich Hayek, and more recently, Deirdre McCloskey, are now recognized for their epistemic acumen. For the new iconoclasts, uncertainty arises out of an ontological *problem*: a conception of the economy as an ever-changing, non-ergodic, complex system in which past patterns cannot yield adequate insight into what will happen next. Uncertainty is now accepted begrudgingly as a most unwelcome condition that threatens the century-long effort by the economics profession to exert control over economic processes and outcomes. And that is worrisome for a profession that has sought, above all else, influence over public affairs. If economists can't "know" and therefore can't "control" the economy, what good are they?

The new uncertainty talk in economics represents a long-overdue correction to the extraordinary degree of hubris among influential economists, not least development economists, that led to a long series of economic disasters. The economic "heroes" of the late 20th century who believed they could know the unknowable and control the uncontrollable did real, profound, damage. Damage measured not just in lost *livelihoods*, but in countless lost *lives* (DeMartino 2022; Stuckler and Basu 2013; Stuckler, King, and McKee 2009).²

But the profession continues to miss something fundamental about uncertainty—its emancipatory power for those seeking to establish progressive and even revolutionary economic initiatives. For us, uncertainty is not just unhappily imposed on us as an epistemic problem arising from ontological complexity. Instead, foregrounding uncertainty is an *ethical imperative* for those engaged in progressive economic transformation. In this thinking we take Albert O. Hirschman as our epistemic guide. Hirschman understood the damage wrought by the pretensions to knowledge. Hirschman argued that knowing the unknowable leads to the pre-narration of history—deciding which social innovations will succeed and fail even before history gets a chance to run its experiments. This mindset posits the prescient knower as a time-traveler who can jump ahead into the future, see how the things we try now work out, and jump back to tell us about that future, today (DeMartino 2022, chap. 5). This is the headspace of the self-certain skeptic who pronounces and forecloses on the effectivity and viability of emerging strategies before they’ve had a chance to take flight. Hirschman associated this mindset with what he called “futilism,” and it derived from thinking that one can know more than one can (Adelman 2013a, 2013b; Alacevich, 2022; Grabel, 2017, chap. 2; Hirschman 2013[1971]). Counterfeit knowledge of this sort—which arises from a desperation to know the unknowable—isn’t just wrong-headed, it is deeply damaging since it deprives new initiatives of the oxygen they need to thrive. In this line of thinking, choosing futilism represents a deep ethical failure. In its place, Hirschman argued for an embrace of our unavoidable ignorance and the human capacity for innovation and problem solving as a wellspring of “possibilism” (Hirschman 2013[1971], 1967b). The point is fundamental. From this perspective, uncertainty isn’t imposed on us by an opaque world—the world doesn’t tell us how to take it, after all. Uncertainty is instead an ethically-laden choice—*something we do*—a refusal to know too much and to foreclose on economic experimentation as we look to intervene in pursuit of social betterment.

But what might all this mean in practice? Here we can do no better than to take inspiration from the diverse economies (DE) project that is now percolating across the globe, the extraordinary creativity and breadth of which are captured in *The Handbook of Diverse Economies* (hereafter, *Handbook*). The DE project demonstrates that we discover in what we don’t know rather than what we do a deep reservoir of productive naivete and problem solving that just might enable us to stumble our way toward a just, sustainable, and responsible economy, one little experiment at a time. Hirschman (1967b) spoke of the “Hiding Hand” that spurred social innovators to take leaps of faith despite overwhelming odds and, sometimes, to prevail through strategies of pragmatic adjustment in response to the obstacles that necessarily arise. We find in DE projects, so well catalogued in the *Handbook*, a parallel ethical stance grounded in the *political choice to not know*, and yet to try.

The DE Tradition

Since the publication of J. K. Gibson-Graham’s [landmark] books--*The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)*: (1996) and *A Postcapitalist Politics* (2006)--we’ve looked toward their work as an inoculant against despair and, more importantly, as an inspiration for how we understand, write, and teach about the economy. Gibson-Graham’s (2008) work urges us to resist the academic need for “strong theory” that claims far too much explanatory power. In its place they advocate “weak theory” that acknowledges what is not and cannot be known, warning us that

“experimental forays . . . are often judged as inadequate before they are explored in all their complexity and incoherence” (6).

The DE tradition helps us to identify and valorize actors, activities, and ways of being that are establishing non-capitalist economic practices, but which are nonetheless dismissed as trivial in the face of the dictates of Global Capitalism. From its inception, the project has demonstrated the value of not-knowing, economic experimentation, and the multiplicity of viable economic trajectories, while respecting the rights and knowledge of those with whom DE practitioners work. Gibson-Graham (2006) were explicit in this regard. Like Hirschman, they warned against the skepticism and closed-mindedness associated with theoretical discourses that presented “Capitalism” as unified, singular, and total. They resisted any vision of the economy grounded in a sutured totality, organized around a central structure, telos, master term, or contradiction that set the terms for and imposed limits on meaningful politics. They urged their readers instead to adopt attitudes that privileged opportunities over constraints, and to open up to economic adventure in search of non-exploitative, sustaining economic practices (Gibson-Graham 1996, 2006; DeMartino 2013). For them, Althusserian overdetermination that posits the social world as unsutured, at odds with itself, and centrally shaped by the discourses we adopt to explain our world is not an ontological claim—a claim that the world deep down really is constituted in complex contradiction.³ It is instead an ethically grounded request, a “discursive strategy” (Gibson-Graham 1996, 45, fn 36). What might we be able to see differently, they ask us, and what opportunities for economic transformation might become available to us, if we can manage to see the world as an overdetermined ensemble or process, sites, and practices (Resnick and Wolff 1987).

DE work is informed by subversive humanist, feminist, anti-colonialist, anti-racist, ecological, and anti-capitalist perspectives. But it departs from much critical work (and broader traditions in social science) in its rejection of any grand plans for social transformation. DE work rejects the idea and hubris associated with the expectation that social inquiry will provide an unimpeachable science from which we are to infer appropriate politics. It has no expectation that change will look the same everywhere; indeed, that expectation is understood to reflect an imperialist aspiration to control (*Handbook*, p. 20). For DE practitioners there is no plan. Instead, “the road is made by walking,” as Machado instructs us. The “starting point of DE is “*what we have here at hand*” (*Handbook*, p. 3, emphasis in original). The approach is directed at “bringing into being economies of ethical interdependence, what might be called *becoming* community economies” (*Handbook*, p. 3, emphasis in original). DE research is committed to “theorizing the economy as a site of ethical action” (*Handbook*, p. 2) that requires inter alia weak as opposed to strong theory that makes what we call “irreparable ignorance” (DeMartino and Gabel 2020) available as a revolutionary opening (see Gibson-Graham 2006, 2008, and Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010; DeMartino 2013). In the words of Gibson-Graham (2006, 6), “experimental forays . . . are often judged as inadequate before they are explored in all their complexity and incoherence.” Like Hirschman, Gibson-Graham rightly recognize that kind of skepticism as a profound ethical failure with real, damaging effects.

As the foregoing suggests, the DE perspective views research and narratives as performative (*Handbook*, p. 7). How we describe the world influences what is seen and what is overlooked or dismissed, and starkly delineates the scope of the possible. “There is No Alternative” (TINA)

was not just a political slogan—it acted as a heavy anchor over the expectations and imaginations of progressives who subscribed to essentialist accounts of the social totality. The left has too often torn itself apart over opposing claims about the uniquely correct, efficacious revolutionary (or even progressive) strategy. But the DE tradition warns that TINA is an effect of discursive choices that handcuff progressives and that yields the futilism that Hirschman warned against (see Adelman 2013a, xvii).

For the left, futilism takes root in discourses that posit a looming image of monolithic Capitalism. DE scholarship rejects this disempowering narrative. DE scholars use the by now well-known image of the iceberg to describe and make sense of what is commonly seen as “the economy.” The iceberg directs our attention to both what’s above the waterline and in plain sight, and, radically, to what lies hidden below. This reflects the DE way of “doing economy” (a term used frequently in the DE literature, e.g., *Handbook*, p. 1), which begins with the view that economies are always internally diverse, heterogeneous, dynamic, and mutable (*Handbook*, p. 6, see discussion of the iceberg p. 9, and the image on p. 10 and discussion in fn12 of chap. 1; p. 1).

Handbook Details

Over the past three decades there has been a remarkable flourishing of the work in the DE tradition. Only rarely has a theoretical breakthrough inspired so much productive, unscripted adventure—in theory and in practice. As the *Handbook* demonstrates, a vast network of scholars, scholar-activists, and activists from around the world are enacting, reshaping, and extending the DE tradition in remarkable, exciting ways across a very wide terrain.

The chief value of the *Handbook* is its success in reflecting and showcasing the precocious theoretical and practical projects of heterogeneous actors. The DE tradition is teeming with life. As the *Handbook*’s contributions document, the movement is engaging, welcoming, available, organic, emergent, and protean.

The *Handbook* can be engaged in a variety of ways. It was particularly powerful to engage the book as a whole.⁴ Most readers will likely focus on particular sections and even individual essays within particular sections. That said, we’d be surprised if readers who take an initial shallow dive didn’t return to explore the book more systematically.

The co-editors’ introductory chapter presents an accessible stand-alone explication of the evolution and key features of the DE approach. It is ideal for teaching and for scholars and activists looking for an overview of DE principles. The *Handbook*’s fifty-eight chapters are organized into substantive sections that introduce readers to what the editors term the “What,” “Who,” and “How” of the DE tradition. The *What* refers to the array of issue areas and contexts where DE is underway. These are corralled under the entry points of enterprises, labour, transactions, property, and finance. Each of these focal areas contains chapters highlighting distinct cases. The *Who* section of the book comprises work on subjectivities, while the *How* includes contributions to the multiple methodologies of the DE approach. Each substantive section of the *Handbook* begins with a framing essay. As with the volume’s introductory essay, the framing essays can be read and assigned on their own. Reading the introductory and all of the framing essays provides a perfect, in-depth primer on the DE tradition. The framing essays

provide accessible discussions of key conceptual foundations, terminology, concerns, and debates that span the chapters in each section. A book with just these essays would have represented a substantive contribution. But here they are joined with chapters that bring to life the abstract ideas with theoretical elaboration and concrete case studies.

The enterprise section is introduced with a framing essay by Cameron (chap. 2, see especially discussion on p. 26). Cameron problematizes conventional understandings of the societal role of what is commonly understood as “business” and its abilities to support an equitable, sustainable future. She foregrounds her discussion with an exploration of the role of class as a foundation of the DE approach, a framing that is based on Resnick and Wolff (1987). Cameron leverages the concept of class (along with weak theory) to illuminate a wide range of enterprise types that have been studied by DE scholars. She also examines the dynamics and drivers of enterprise change and the wider factors that provide the conditions of existence for enterprises. Cameron argues that DE scholarship shows that “enterprises have the potential to play a pivotal role in building better futures based on an ethical commitment to the well-being of other humans, other species, and the environment” (p. 37). The enterprise section includes chapters on worker cooperatives, community-owned infrastructure, eco-social and enterprises, anti-Mafia enterprise, state and community enterprise, independent and small businesses, and the capitalist corporation.

The labour section is introduced with a framing essay by McKinnon (chap. 12, see especially p. 116). McKinnon explores the multiple meanings and interdependencies among diverse types of work. She reminds us that traditional understandings of work focus on paid or waged labour. She argues that in a DE approach, explicit recognition is given to many kinds of labour (and the blending thereof). Besides paid labor there is the unpaid work that people do to sustain each other (e.g., maintaining a household, subsistence agriculture, volunteering, and caretaking). Thus, labour sustains life and contributes to social, cultural, and spiritual needs. McKinnon asks us to rethink the economy and to rethink what labour consist of “to see and value all the diverse kinds of work” and to understand the interrelationships among its distinct social contributions (p. 125). The labour section includes chapters on precarious, informal and unpaid, caring, non-human, collectively performed reciprocal, and migrant women’s labour.

The transactions section is introduced with a framing essay by Diprose (chap. 21, see especially p. 195). As with all of the framing essays, the essay on transactions breaks with conventional understandings. Traditionally, one thinks of an economic transaction as the exchange or transfer of commodities, services, or capital through the market. Diprose challenges us to think about a broader range of economic transactions, sites (such as communities and organizations), mechanisms through which transactions are mediated or enacted, and the ways they affect and sustain people’s lives and relationships with other people and the non-human world. Diprose’s essay takes us into the world of ethics, relationships, negotiations, trust, and value. A key concern for the author is how to build “more equitable transactions that foster livable lives for more people” (p. 203). The transactions section includes chapters on gleaning, direct producer-consumer transactions, collective provisioning, alternative currencies, time banking, fair trade, social procurement, and sharing.

St. Martin (chap. 30, see especially p. 271) provides the framing essay for the section on property. St. Martin challenges us to think beyond traditional individualistic, private conceptions

of property that focus on a “thing in itself” (p. 271). The traditional view flattens property to a single legal principle, and to the existence of a title that grants ownership rights to possess and exclude. Against this view, St. Martin argues that there exist many “practices of property” and that, above all, property is a relationship between people with respect to things. Particularly interesting is his discussion of the dynamics and powers of property, e.g., showing that it “can be overtaken and ‘occupied’ by collective action to initiate different engagements with property such that it serves community ends in beneficial and ethical ways” (p. 271). Among St. Martin’s chief objectives is to “repurpose property for collective benefit” (p. 280) by showing that property can be leveraged in the practice known as “commoning.” The property section includes chapters on commoning, community land trusts, urban land markets, and diverse legalities.

Safri and Madra (chap. 37) introduce the section on finance. They note that finance can take monetary and non-monetary forms. They offer “sweat equity” as an example of a non-monetary form of finance. The authors take a class-based approach to finance and argue that “there is nothing inherently ethical or unethical about finance... it can be either, or both” (p. 334). They argue that finance can be deployed to support collective processes, actors, or organizations, and in that context can facilitate communities and replenish the commons. The essay illuminates many of the diverse forms that finance takes and the roles that it plays. Among them is what Safri and Madra call “dark finance” which includes inter alia debt bondage, extractive forms of finance, finance in slavery, pawn shops, payday lenders, and processes of financialization. They also discuss finance that they see as “working against the grain,” such as finance-as-a-commons, forms of profit-sharing finance, diverse banks and banking arrangements, debt jubilee, and finance as support for post-capitalist politics. The finance section includes chapters on Islamic finance, rotating savings and credit associations, indigenous finance, community finance, and hacking finance.

The section on subjectivity is introduced with a framing essay by Healy, Özselçuk, and Madra (chap. 43, see especially p. 389). The authors provide us with an intellectual history of the evolution of DE thinking on the “decentered subject.” In this context they pursue an “open-ended and anti-essentialist approach that is at the center of the DE tradition” (p. 389). They argue for the importance of holding an “open, experimental disposition of the decentered subject” (p. 389) and conclude by discussing recent work that “demotes the primacy of the human subject” (p. 389). The section includes chapters on more-than-human agency and ecological livelihoods, power and the uses of genealogy, shifting subjectivity, affect and subjectivity, challenging hetero- and homonormativity, and post-development subjectivity transformation.

Roelvink (chap. 50, see especially p. 454) introduces the section on methodology. Roelvink draws on a range of scholarship to reject the traditional view of methodology (always in the singular) as centered around epistemic certainty. In the traditional view, the social world is knowable, simple as opposed to complex, tractable, and stable. Thus, methodology from this perspective is a process that discovers a singular reality that exists separate from our perception of it. It discovers stable, generalizable conclusions. Against this backdrop, Roelvink discusses what’s distinctive about DE methodologies. DE methodologies are, above all, innovative and collaborative, and they foreground the ineluctable uncertainties in our world. The DE methods discussed in the framing essay and in the subsequent chapters are marked by their commitment to transformation, pluralism, place-based experimentation, and an ethical commitment to respect

for others. Chapters in the section explore a range over methods for translating diverse economies in the Anglocene, reading for economic difference, field methods for assemblage analysis, visualizing and analyzing DEs with global information systems, indigenous methodologies, action research, and artistic means as a vehicle for research. We found this section particularly fascinating, instructive, and full of powerful insights that lend themselves to classroom use in courses on DE or in broader courses on what is usually termed “research methods” to correct for the standard positivist conceptions that so often dominate methods training.

Anti-Empiricist Empirical Work

Key to the DE approach is the importance of observation. Focused attention presumes, looks for, and then finds diverse economic actors and practices (*Handbook*, p. 1). But the approach is not empiricist. We don’t just see what’s there, awaiting excavation; theoretical choices dictate what we can see. Einstein put it this way: “Whether you can observe a thing or not depends on the theory which you use. It is the theory which decides what can be observed” (cited in Salam 1990). It bears repeating—the world refrains from dictating how we take it. Seeing differently is, then, an always-available possibility that we can choose to exploit in service of economic emancipation. In a world in which the dominant conception is of a totalizing Capitalism, the ethical imperative is to conjure up a world in which a fragile capitalism’s reign is precarious, so that we can enable visions of alternatives. In Hirschman’s words, “the fundamental bent of my writings has been to widen the limits of what is or is perceived to be possible, be it at the cost of lowering our ability, real or imaginary, to discern the probable” (Hirschman 2013[1971], 22). In his diary he asked, “Aren’t we interested in what is (barely) possible, rather than what is probable?” (Adelman 2013a, xii). The DE answer to the question is a resounding “yes.”

Experimentation and Importance of “The Small”

The importance of economic experimentation is a strong theme in Gibson-Graham (e.g., 2006) and in fact runs through all DE work (p. 2 of *Handbook*). It is centrally displayed throughout the *Handbook*’s chapters. In this tradition, experiments with (rather than on) communities seeking economic alternatives are often quite small—say, converting one small business into a democratic worker coop.⁵ For this reason the DE approach is often criticized as deeply inadequate for securing economic justice, sustainability, or other valued goals in the face of overwhelming global forces that necessarily subvert these paltry efforts. But here, again, we find guidance in Hirschman, who served as a World Bank economist for a few years and came to know firsthand about the presumption that only grand initiatives could make a difference. Hirschman spoke of the significance of “development processes *in the small*” (Hirschman 1969[1958], ix, emphasis in original). He argued that strategies “should be developed as much as possible in an experimental spirit, in the style of a pilot project gathering strength and experience gradually” (Hirschman 1967a, 19; see Grabel 2017, 231). Hirschman emphasized equally learning by doing and learning from others, where each success and failure provided insights for subsequent initiatives.⁶ As to scale, he rejected the idea of working on massive projects given the exceedingly dangerous epistemic hubris of the development expert upon whose apparent wisdom the master plan depended, and the associated ethical problem that failure of the plan would harm so many. Moreover, large-scale projects in the so-called developing

countries required a patronizing view of backwardness that held them to be simple and tractable systems that permitted the development expert to know just what levers to pull to bring about the right outcomes. For Hirschman, that kind of thinking reflected a disdain for the poor that licensed the development expert to experiment on those who were most desperate. Hirschmanian learning, on the other hand, was to be a social process involving partnership, in which adjustments could be worked out on small scales via the application of local knowledge and ingenuity in confrontation with inevitable failures, where successes could inspire replication and, when appropriate, expansion.

Final Reflections

We are standing on the brink in so many respects. We don't have the luxury of doing nothing. There is much work to do, quickly, in confrontation with "wicked problems" like global inequality, climate change, and more. For those of us (all of us?) who are captured by a "Capitalocentric" world view, at least much of the time, the daunting question "what is to be done?" reveals to us our extraordinary inadequacies to meet the challenges of our time. Despair then appears as the only warranted response – and certainly, the only ethically appropriate response—for those seeking a just, sustainable world. Be we've learned from the extraordinary feminist theologian and activist Sharon Welch that despair is the response of the privileged who have lived with the illusion of control over the world (Welch 2006). When confronted with moments when that control is recognized as unattainable, the privileged are prone to recoil. In its place, Welch calls on us to adopt an "ethic of risk," which she traces to womanist traditions especially in marginalized communities, where there is no option but to carry on; where the luxury of despair is unavailable. Under an ethic of risk we are called upon to face up to the fact that the world is one we cannot ever know, and never control. The ethic of risk drives us to act nonetheless, without pretensions of our moral right or practical ability to determine what happens next.

The DE tradition fits within and enacts Welch's ethic of risk. It is a tradition that refuses the comfort of despair, and the self-certainty of social narratives that assure us that we inhabit a world of evil, from which we must absent ourselves to retain our moral virtue. The DE tradition reveals to us the revolutionary work underway, always, as individuals and communities find ways to enact respectful, sustaining human and human-non-human relationships that allow them to provision in non-exploitative ways. Choosing despair can't be the right response, when alternative worlds are flourishing all around us that need us to establish the grounding for their viability. To despair is to join into an unholy alliance with those who benefit from the status quo, who make alternative worlds appear as beyond reach.

Engagement with the *Handbook*, like so much of the work in the DE tradition, emboldens and empowers. For us, the project reflects the accumulated wisdom we find in DE scholar activists that has been generated by those we have cited here. Hirschman notably concluded his important essay on "Political Economics and Possibilism" by identifying "the right to a nonprojected future as one of the truly inalienable rights of every person and community; . . . [setting] the stage for conceptions of change to which the inventiveness of history and a 'passion for the possible' are admitted as vital actors" (Hirschman 2013[1971], 30; see also Hirschman 2013[1970], 147; Adelman 2013a, xii). For her part, Welch (2006, 37) asks of us, "What improbable task, with

what unpredictable results, shall we undertake today”? The DE practitioners represented in the *Handbook* answer that question with an astounding range of initiatives that have no business succeeding...and yet, sometimes, they do. DE practitioners demonstrate that when a courageous appreciation of what we don't and can't know rather than a manufactured, sham certainty guides progressive politics, there are no limits to the range of inspiring initiatives awaiting enactment.

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Notes

- ¹ Gibson-Graham borrow the extraordinary fecund concept from Sedgwick (1993, xii).
- ² Adam Smith ([1759]1976, 286) anticipated the dangers of 20th century heroic economists who preached global neoliberalism in his name. He warned over the “men of system” who thought themselves capable of and morally warranted in shaping society according to some master plan.
- ³ Hirschman (2013[1970], 151-52). commented favorably on Althusser’s work, including the concept of overdetermination, though he argued that the concept should be termed “uniqueness.”
- ⁴ We had the great privilege of serving as readers of the handbook during some of drafting phases, including during conversations at a weeklong DE writing retreat in Bolsena, Italy in 2018.
- ⁵ Experimenting *on* communities today often takes the form of “randomized controlled trials” (RCTs) in which empiricist social scientists seek to uncover the viability of various “treatments” by dividing research subjects into treatment and control groups, replicating strategies used to

discern the effects of interventions like the effects of new pharmaceuticals on animal or human subjects. In contrast, Hirschman called for and DE practitioners enact experimentation *with*, in in partnership with communities who are recognized as possessing wisdom and agency in their own right.

⁶ Discussion in this paragraph draws on Grabel's (2017, chap. 2) discussion of Hirschman's work. Additional citations to Hirschman's work can be found there.