

Identity, Backwardness and Tolerance: On Undisciplining the Discipline*

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Abstract: In this lecture, I trace the relevance of the word *backwardness*, and its imbrication in the affiliated words *identity* and *tolerance*, for the discipline of political economy; and in particular, for its two constituent subdisciplines of development economics and liberal political theory. Towards this end, I project the word *backwardness* to two different registers: on the one hand, to its use by Burke and Mill to delineate the relationship that an imperial power bears to its dependencies, and on the other, to its use by Gerschenkron to understand Russian industrialization at the turn of the century. For both of these investigations, questions of *identity* and *tolerance* constitute an important ambient subtext, and I draw on recent investigations of Bernard Williams to emphasize their relevance. Whereas the lecture avoids reference to specific topical concerns, its basic commitment and underlying point of departure is to the understanding of *theory* and *theorizing*, and it concludes with a presentation of a simple model that brings the Gerschenkron effect into analytical focus, however emaciated such a focus may be.

Keywords: Identity, backwardness, tolerance, economic development, liberalism, theory, theorizing, Gerschenkron effect.

JEL Classifications: A12, A13, F54, N01, O41

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