

Relativism issues: *The econocracy* against multiple-choice questions

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Abstract. This paper draws attention to a worry concerning what the book *The econocracy* says about multiple-choice questions versus essays. They face a problem reminiscent of the problems facing various kinds of relativism.

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If you don't pay the rent, it's New York—

That's what it looks like at this fork!

Why use multiple choice questions? The book *The econocracy* proposes that multiple-choice exams are a way of coping with large volumes of students at non-elite universities:

In this context multiple-choice exams are less costly to mark than essays because the whole process can be automated... Mathematical problems and multiple-choice questions have fixed 'right' and 'wrong' answers which can be provided to teaching assistants on a crib sheet, avoiding the need for the costly training and support that would facilitate critical group discussion. (2016: 138)

The authors favour essay assessment, where there are no fixed right and wrong answers apparently. There is considerable leeway in which positions one can take up, as long as other requirements are met. But don't they face a problem which begins with these three propositions?

- (a) They are writing against multiple-choice questions using the essay genre.
- (b) There are no fixed right and wrong answers in this genre. There is considerable leeway.
- (c) Someone responds to their case by writing an essay in favour of multiple-choice questions.

They are going to have to say that the essay referred to in (c) is acceptable as well, or acceptable if it meets certain requirements of structure, background reading, referencing, etc. In which case, why can't institutions say, "If that is acceptable, then we will implement the recommendations of that essay"?

Reference

Earle, J., Moran, C., and Ward-Perkins, Z. 2016. *The econocracy*. Manchester: University of Manchester Press.