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Michael H. Turk, *The Idea of History in Constructing Economics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 242, \$163 (hardcover), \$54.95 (e-book). ISBN 978-1-138-80889-8 (hardcover); 978-1-315-75036-1 (e-book).

doi: 10.1017/S1053837216000614

As a contribution to the ongoing long-lived debate about the essential nature of economics, Michael Turk argues that economics should be "constructed" as a "historical science." This position is worked out in ten essays, of which five were previously published (chapters 1–3, 5, and 6). The outlines for the need for this construction are clarified in various chapters by contrasting historical economics with "ahistorical" approaches that were proposed as appropriate models for economics: in chapter 1 with (Newtonian) physics, in chapter 2 with French mathematics around 1900, in chapter 5 with evolutionary biology, and in chapter 7 with Max Weber's sociology. In chapter 9 historical economics is also compared with a historical approach: namely, economic history. Turk discusses in a detailed way, and by drawing on broad historical knowledge, the various reasons why these models do not work for economics. One of these, explored by Turk in chapter 3, is the nature of time in natural science in contrast with its nature in economics, using Joan Robinson's distinction between logical time and historical time. For example, time in thermodynamics is of a different nature from that in economics, notwithstanding that in both fields time has just one direction, unlike in Newtonian physics. Although these chapters are interesting and engaging historical essays about the interactions between economics and the foregoing approaches, they do not aid in the construction of historical economics. Or, if they do give aid, it is only in the negative sense of showing how not to use such interactions as models of construction.

The outlines of a historical economics, "a positive construction of historical economics," come to the surface in those essays (chapters 4, 6, and 10) where Turk discusses the role of narratives in economics. The kind of narrative that Turk employs in his construction is based on the one that Mary Morgan explores in her recent *The World in the Model* (2012). According to Turk, "Morgan sees storytelling as playing an essential mediating role in linking the abstraction to the reality of economic life as perceived and experienced" (p. 101). Morgan, however, places "the narrative form fundamentally outside the bounds of historical time" (p. 101). So, while Turk takes it as a "truism" that

every theory tells a story, “there must be a way to make the case for better or worse storylines, and preferably on a systematic foundation and platform” (p. 226). As Turk sees it, “they must derive their force from the historical context in which they are found” (p. 226). The systematic foundation and platform, borrowed from the arts and linguistics, are four “critical elements”: 1. setting the stage; 2. colligation—that is, the linkage between past and present; 3. periodization; and 4. genre of presentation.

The examination of narratives in economics is an enquiry into four different modes of narrative itself. One mode is the assortment of plotlines or genres, a second is the layering of narrative as in the case of allegories, a third is the appearance and use of tropes and figures, and a fourth is the literary form, such as the fable. I would prefer to see economics as a bundle of fables, because fables convey morals. It would explain in what sense economics is a normative science, not by providing prescriptions but by telling what should be considered to be good. I guess that Turk prefers another literary form, that of the novel, “with its heightening of fiction all the better to convey fact and reality, and shaping the longstanding and often dominant role of conjecture in economics” (p. 228). This literary form of the novel provides Turk an engaging format to clarify the narrative of Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2013).

The remaining puzzle is why Turk does not wish to denote the kind of economics he is aiming at by the label “economic narratology,” or “narrative economics,” instead of “historical economics.” This is even more puzzling because in chapter 8 he discusses critically the idea of “historical proof,” particularly in the context of “the fraught relation” between economics and economic history. A historical proof does not provide empirical evidence; it “constitutes conformity with a certain narrative” (p. 168). The heuristics of history is not that it provides historical facts, as economic history does, but it “entails the embrace of narratives” (p. 167). It is the narrative element of history that links economics with history, not economic history. The solution to this puzzle, though he does not mention it explicitly, is that he considers *history* in its original, etymological meaning: namely, “story” that is in the Middle English sense a “narrative record of past events” (Harper 2001–16).

I regret that this book is not written as a monograph, and thus can be better characterized as a collection of essays, with the obvious consequences of some repetition of arguments and lack of linkages among the essays. Fortunately, the missing linkages are provided in the last essay. But if one accepts this book in this format, one will appreciate it as a nice collection of sophisticated reflections on the nature of economics from different perspectives and in comparison with other disciplines.

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