they have endeavored "to understand the framing of the questions of the literary record in [any] particular time and place" and "to formulate some tenable generalizations," believing that the history of past economic thinking "reveals the existence of imagination and the tests to which vision is put" (p. 326). This is indeed a laudable aim, but we are, no doubt understandably, given no indication of how it is to be achieved. The concluding chapter contains brief comments on Methodology; The Mechanism of Professionalization (Orthodoxies, Teaching, Research Journals); a disquisition on Modern Scientism; and The Current Frontier, all of which could provide material for a monograph or a series of monographs. Of course, given the massive scale of this enterprise it is surely unreasonable to ask for more. Yet it must be noted that Mark Perlman, the senior author, has had unrivaled opportunities to study the economics profession and to evaluate it with learning and insight—indeed with the vision and imagination it demands.

A. W. Coats
University of Nottingham

Michalis Psalidopoulos, ed., *The Canon in the History of Economics: Critical Essays* (London and New York: Routledge: 1999) pp. xvi, 254, $90. ISBN 0 415 19154 8.

When Paul Samuelson published "The Canonical Classical Model of Political Economy" in 1978, neither economists nor historians of economics leapt at the opportunity to deconstruct the canon. We recognized that he had behaved a little like Cinderella's wicked stepsisters. We knew he had hacked off the unruly toes of a gargantuan and ill-formed classical economics to make the slipper fit. But, for the most part, we were prepared to ignore the pooling blood.

Those socialized to the discipline of economics like elegance; we prefer tidy theories and we loathe inconsistencies. And historians of economic thought are trained as economists. For that reason more than any other, the "canon wars" that have enveloped literature and history have largely bypassed the history of economic thought. As editor Michalis Psalidopoulos points out, our leading textbooks paint a tidy but rather bloodless picture of the development of economics: an idea is produced, codified in the form of a text, communicated and, if found to be "sound," canonized (xii). This is almost as stylized a story as the textbook growth model. Questions and ideas about the canon have only recently begun to emerge in our field, beginning with Vivienne Brown's *Adam Smith's Discourse: Canonicity, Commerce and Conscience* (1994) and C. D. Mackie's *Canonizing Economic Theory: How Theories and Ideas are Selected in Economics* (1998). Do we have anything to gain by opening our inquiries to the kind of searching questions that have animated literature and history?

The Canon in the History of Economics is a collection of critical essays on the theme of canonicity that were originally presented at the third European Conference on the History of Economics. It is a fine book of well-crafted and often-fascinating investigations that illustrate at once the rich terrain that these new questions and investigations have begun to open, and the tracts of *Terra Incognita* that remain. These essays try to identify the canon among some of the most important contributions to the history of economics, and then subject it to criticism.

Louis Baeck argues that Aristotle conceived of economic development and trade as subordinate to the ethical and sociopolitical norms of the *polis*. The medieval revival of his work, however, ignored the environment in which he wrote, and transmitted to us a version of Aristotle that portrays him as an ancestor of modern economics. Thomas Moser considers the medieval prohibition of usury. He argues that our histories of economic thought ignore Patristic literature between the first and eighth centuries, in which the prohibition of lending at interest was not the significant issue it became after Charlemagne united political power to Church teaching.

Arild Saether and Jan Peil turn their respective lenses on Adam Smith. Saether recovers the rich pre-Smithian literature on self-interest, and he argues that standard histories of economics, which marginalize the contributions made by political philosophers to this issue, serve to separate economics and political philosophy, to the detriment of both disciplines. Peil integrates recent work on Smith, which portrays him as an eighteenth-century political philosopher rather than as a nascent neo-classical economist. The way in which he conceptualized "economic man" is at the heart of the issue.

Terenzio Maccabelli reconsiders the debate between Thomas Robert Malthus and David Ricardo in the light of Samuelson's canonical growth model. He argues that Ricardo represents an "engineering" view of economics, while Malthus approaches the discipline from an "ethical" perspective. The similarities in their respective growth models, he argues, belie fundamentally different conceptions of scarcity and human behavior.

Peter Rosner also examines Ricardo and tries to understand why David Ricardo has become part of the canon, while the contributions of K. H. Rau, Ricardo's contemporary, have been relatively ignored. He argues that this is particularly perplexing, because he believes that Ricardo's value theory is based on a now rejected labor theory, while Rau's contributions to welfare economics are relatively consistent with contemporary ideas. He concludes that the systematic nature of Ricardo's theory—and his willingness to draw from it policy implications—is more highly valued by economists than the subtler insights of Rau.

One of the more interesting historical attempts to reconstruct the canon occurred in the writing of William Stanley Jevons. Bert Mosselmans traces Jevons's attempts to create a pedigree by searching out forerunners, an international movement of ideas, by making alliances with foreign mathematicians and a new canon by writing a textbook. Despite these efforts, Jevons was betrayed by fate. His own early death, and the contributions of Alfred Marshall and J. B. Clark, allowed his own work to be integrated into the canon as an extension of the Ricardian stream that he had attempted to displace.

J. K. Ingram, Terrence McDonough argues, never achieved canonical status because he refused to accept that economies could be modeled independently of the rest of society. Consequently, he never accepted that economics could be a discipline independent of sociology.

Mauro Boianovsky traces the fluctuating fortunes of G. Haberler's *Prosperity and Depression* and J. M. Keynes's *General Theory*. Until the mid 1970s, Keynes's predominance in macroeconomics was unchallenged. Since that time, non-Keynesian explanations for the business cycle, such as Haberler's, have been resuscitated.

E. Preobrazhensky developed a theory of primitive socialist accumulation that Michalis Hatziprokopiou and Kostas Velentzas argue was useful to Western-development economists in the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, this Russian Marxist was excluded from the Marxist canon. Hatziprokopiou and Velentzas draw a lesson from this: heterodox thinkers are often excluded from the canon, but enriching the canon by reintegrating their work can build bridges between different schools of thought.

Albert Arouh recognizes that the idea of the canon comes from religion, and he explores the usefulness of telling the story of the development of economics as the story of a dominant religion—the canon—resisting the incursion of heterodoxy. The battle, of course, can never be won. Just as Manicheanism recurs in new dress, so do heterodox faiths in economics.

The final essay in the book, by Henk Plasmeijer and Evert Schoorl, revisits the neoclassical synthesis from a Dutch perspective. They consider how a canon that has an international appeal also functions socially in particular historical and cultural circumstances both within the community of scientists and in society at large. They argue that Dutch postwar economics was largely defined by its policy relevance, and that the institutionalization of a collective bargaining economy created a particular market niche for economic ideas that the neoclassical synthesis was especially suited to fill.

These essays are not intended as the last word on canonicity. Instead, they open a discussion. They critically examine a very wide range of themes from a variety of perspectives. But they do not resolve the most fundamental question: what exactly is the canon in the history of economics, and how is it relevant to our discipline? The authors do not subscribe to a uniform view, and that dispute is the strength of this collection.

Michalis Psalidopoulos begins by trying to define the word "canon," and he has recourse to the *Oxford Dictionary*. This source yields "a general rule, standard or principle by which something is judged, a list of sacred books or a set of writings accepted as genuine by a group or a particular author," and notes the roots of the concept in theology (xii). But a dictionary is only an authority on a static and uncontroversial concept. When the very definition is the subject of debate, a dictionary will not take us very far. In the context of these essays, and others that will follow, we will determine as a community what we mean by "canon," and whether the concept is as fruitful to us as historians of economic thought as it is to literary and historical scholars. In our use of the idea, we will determine its meaning. Is a group of authors "canonical," a set of books "canonical," or (as Samuelson and Mackie would have it) is a set of ideas that is widely shared by a particular group of authors, but neither exclusive to these authors nor uniformly expressed by them, what we mean by "canon?" Most, but not all, of the essays in this collection subscribe to the third meaning: the "canon" is a set of ideas, shared to a greater or lesser extent by a particular

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1053837200007318 Published online by Cambridge University Press

group of authors. How are those ideas created and shared in the first place, and how are they reproduced and standardized and ultimately replaced by a new consensus? The essays tackle these questions, and they rightly do so in the context of concrete case studies.

This collection raises provocative questions for subsequent analysis. I would like to know more about what is excluded from our histories. What heresies recur, and in what forms? How many times, for example, have under-consumptionist theories appeared, only to be set aside by whatever orthodoxy reigned? Why are these particular heresies so attractive and tenacious? What do they capture that the orthodoxy excludes? How would our discipline be transformed if we could integrate these heterodox approaches? The subtle and imaginative perspectives that Roy Porter has brought to the history of medicine in his studies of eighteenth-century "quackery," for example, could have a useful and amusing counterpart in the history of economics. Studying the history of "error" is at least as productive as examining the march of "truth," and it is usually a lot more entertaining.

Another opportunity for further research centers on the role of the reader. Reading is not a passive activity. We know this intellectually, because we often justify the inclusion of the history of economic thought in the training of economists by pointing out that reading old texts from new perspectives can be a fruitful source of new theoretical insights. And yet, we write our histories with an overwhelming focus on the producers of knowledge. How did others read the great works of our past, and with what effect? And is their understanding necessarily less valid than the original intent of the author? A reader brings to any text a rich set of associations that constrain the ways in which an idea can be understood and integrated in a particular cultural context. Some of the essays in this volume begin to examine how ideas are "misunderstood"—Smith is "mistakenly" characterized as a predecessor of neoclassical economics (Peil), or "inappropriately" stripped of his political philosophy (Saether), or Aristotle is similarly de-politicized (Baeck). Others examine the conditions under which particular ideas are found to be useful or attractive (Plasmeijer and Schoorl, Rosner, and Boianovsky). An obvious extension of this idea is to examine works in translation. What gets translated, by whom, and how? What can we learn from the ways in which others interpret a work? Here the appropriate analogy may be musical. When we listen to a new interpretation of a symphony, we learn something about the composer we did not know, and at the same time we learn about the artist whose expression we have just heard.

All of this, of course, leads to an obvious capsule judgement: this is a book worth reading, and Michalis Psalidopoulos and the participants in the 1997 ECHE conference ought to be congratulated for raising important questions.

Evelyn L. Forget
University of Manitoba

REFERENCES

Brown, Vivienne. 1994. *Adam Smith's Discourse: Canonicity, Commerce and Conscience.* London and New York: Routledge.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1053837200007318 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Forget, E. L. and S. Peart. 2000. *Reflections on the Classical Canon in Economics: Essays in Honor of Samuel Hollander.* London and New York: Routledge.

Mackie, C. D. 1998.*Canonizing Economic Theory: How Theories and Ideas are Selected in Economics.* London and New York: M. E. Sharpe.

Porter, Roy. 1989. *Health for Sale: Quackery in England 1660 - 1850*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Samuelson. Paul A. 1978. "The Canonical Classical Model of Political Economy." *Journal of Economic Literature* 16: 1415- 34.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1053837200007318 Published online by Cambridge University Press