Journal of the History of Economic Thought,
Volume 39, Number 3, September 2017

BOOK REVIEWS

Roger E. Backhouse and Philippe Fontaine, eds., *A Historiography of the Modern Social Sciences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 248, $98. ISBN: 978-1-10703-772-4.

doi: 10.1017/S1053837217000207

Even though this is an important book, I feel a bit awkward in reviewing it in this journal. My readers here presumably are historians of economics with established views on how to approach the history of economics, especially the history of recent—meaning post-World War II—economics. Such readers would likely have taken positions on, or at least would be cognizant of positions on, historical reconstruction, Whig history, the presumed audience for the history of economics, and related historiographic matters. From this particular disciplinary perspective, the Backhouse–Fontaine volume would on the surface appear to be an opportunity to see how other social sciences "do it": how they approach their own recent disciplinary history, their diverse styles of historical reasoning, and so on.

Backhouse and Fontaine's volume, however, is rather subversive to such a reading. Their central claim is that an important part of the rise of the social sciences in the postwar period is associated with "cross-disciplinary engagements guided by a common problem-oriented approach" (p. 2). They go on to make their central claim that "recent work has laid the foundations from moving from largely disciplinary histories—of psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, and political science—to a history of the social sciences as a whole.… We argue for a comparative interdisciplinary historiography of the social sciences" (p. 2). Their joint engagement began with a series of seminars at the London School of Economics, starting in January 2006. This led to Fontaine's large research project examining the rise of social sciences in the postwar period, and continued with his and Backhouse's involvement in creating the new society concerned with the history of recent economics (HISRECO). The first major report on the results of that project began to appear in 2010 with the Backhouse–Fontaine volume *The History of the Social Sciences Since 1945* and the *HOPE* Conference volume (2010b) they co-edited. The former volume assembled a series of disciplinary histories by a variety of social scientists and permitted the editors to reflect not only on the similarities and differences of those particular histories, but also on their various approaches to constructing histories. The present volume is a natural next step.

Following their co-authored introduction, the volume consists of a set of invited essays on the historiography of the several social science disciplines. The history of anthropology, the history of sociology, psychology, economics, and political science are examined apace, and all of the authors wrestle with the editors' central question: What are the particular historiographic perspectives at play in the disciplinary writing of post-World War II social sciences? The late Henrika Kuklick, who wrote on the

ISSN 1053-8372 print; ISSN 1469-9656 online/17/03000401-411

history of anthropology, showed how the origins of the field became somewhat lost in its fragmentation during the postwar years. She showed how the history of anthropology became an academic specialty after 1965 with the creation of the *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*. She developed several themes that should be familiar to historians of economics:

> First there is old-fashioned history of ideas: Ideas are analyzed in abstraction from any sort of social context, using the approach that historians of science used to call 'internalism.' … Such accounts may be qualified with pronouncements that contemporary anthropologists know more about certain things than their predecessors.… Then, there is … what historians of science used to call 'externalism' … that is, ideas are explained as products of patronage. (pp. 67–68)

Kuklick herself admited that "I began writing the history of my discipline in the presentist spirit—trying to explain how sociology took what I believe to be a wrong turn when functionalists became the discipline's dominant theorists in the late 1930s" (p. 69n20). Having worked in a history of science department for many years, Kuklick was aware of how "[p]resentist historians of the various social sciences have also worried about where in the academy their disciplines fit." She observed that "the shortcomings of the literature on the history of anthropology become clear when one considers works produced by historians of the other social sciences" (p. 90), paying particular attention to Kurt Danziger's writings in psychology and Marion Fourcade's writings in economics. Her chapter concludes with a suggestion that writing the history of anthropology is immensely more complicated than writing the history of psychology, for example, since anthropology partakes of so many different academic specializations and institutional homes.

Charles Camic, writing on the history of sociology, points out that while the history of psychology has moved from the periphery of that discipline more to the mainstream over time, and while in economics that pattern is precisely reversed, in sociology "one finds a more oscillating pattern: disciplinary marginality, followed by greater centrality, followed by a return to the margins" (p. 101). Following a useful examination of *JSTOR* articles on the history of sociology from 1945 to 2012, Camic examines the presentist–historicist distinction in writings in the history of sociology. He provides a detailed examination of each of the three phases of the fall and rise of the history of sociology. Of the most recent of these periods, Camic notes that "only by the persistent efforts of a small band of historians of sociology was strong opposition to the subfield inside the American Sociological Association overcome with the formal establishment in 2000 of the History of Sociology section, a section that has since remained among the smallest in the ASA and, as such, annually at risk of elimination" (p. 123). Camic concludes that disparate appraisals of the nature of work in the history of sociology attest "to a situation likely only to reinforce the sometimes stultifying ambivalence that sociologists at large have often felt about the historiography of their family—an ambivalence likely, perhaps, to bedevil historians of sociology until they find their own center" (p. 129).

James H. Capshew takes up, in chapter 5, the history of psychology since 1945. He notes that the history of psychology "became his scholarly specialty in the 1960s,

when American psychology became an influential if not the dominant idiom for professional discourse and practice in much of the world" (p. 145). He argues that the situation in psychology was very similar to that in sociology: in the immediate postwar period the history of psychology was of interest to, and often written and read by, scientific and professional psychologists. In the next period, lasting until the 1990s, there was an increase in the professionalization of historical inquiry and there emerged a critical historiography "and a measure of academic establishment" (p. 146). Since that time the status of the history of psychology has fluctuated, but overall it has weakened within psychology even as it has emerged with a "respectable status within the history of science field" (p. 146). The *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* began publishing early in 1965, drawing upon a prior readership of the *History of Behavioral Sciences* newsletter. Thus, the professionalization of the history of psychology emerged at the same time as the professionalization of the history of economics with the founding of *History of Political Economy* in the late 1960s. The same tensions emerged in economics and have continued to the present day. "The field of psychology gave it subject matter whereas the field of history provided methodology. Some psychologist-historians were committed to historical analysis as a route to improve psychology, and some historically trained historians of psychology were interested in aims that fell outside this agenda" (p. 154). Much as was true in sociology and in economics, among the motivations of the psychologist-historians was their hope "to recapture dreams of system and unity in the face of continued fragmentation of psychological theory and practice" (p. 156). This attempt to reform psychology, much as heterodox attempts to reform economics through historical writing, weakened over time as new contributions from scholars trained in history produced a complex contextualization of psychology within larger intellectual projects of the postwar world. Capshew recapitulates the increasingly sophisticated discussion among historians of psychology in the 1980s and 1990s as they argued for an escape from "great man" studies and urged use of archival materials, documents, and other matters outside a heroic master tale of progress. Capshew thinks well of this attempt to reconstruct the history of psychology, and his chapter ends on a modestly optimistic note. He suggests that even in current debates there are continuations of

> a longstanding debate in the history of psychology about proper approaches to the past, pitting presentists against historicists once again. It is also a sign of a healthy professional community concerned about foundational issues. No doubt historians of psychology will pursue these and other themes in the future as they endeavor to make sense of the psychological enterprise and its human complexity. Whether psychologists listen to them is another matter entirely. (p. 176)

Probably of most interest to readers of this journal is chapter 6, which Backhouse and Fontaine titled "Contested Identities: The History of Economics since 1945." Their premise is that "most historians of economics are trained as economists and think of themselves as such, but the remainder of the economics profession cannot see the significance of the history of economics for what they are doing" (p. 183). Even those who write in the history of economics who consider themselves historians "do not escape issues of identity … since, the notion that economics can be seen as a science standing alongside the natural sciences has met with the resistance of those

who see such a position as linked to a view of science as cumulative and therefore in no need of its past" (pp. 184–185).

The authors point out that many historians of science indeed keep their distance from the history of economics because they read historians of economics as saying "that published texts offer an immediate access to the past that renders its re-creation a trivial task" (p. 185). The authors review the history of the history of economics from the beginning of the postwar period. With respect to contemporary economics, their central theme is: "To be recognized as an economist it is necessary to participate in the process of creating and propagating economic knowledge, whereas to be recognized as a historian it is necessary to make historical claims that go beyond what might be found in a survey in an economics journal. As we get close to the present, these two roles enter into conflict" (p. 186).

They make this point by recapitulating, first, the diminished role that history of economics played in the postwar transformation of economics, then to its reinvigoration in the late 1960s as historians of economics began to see themselves as engaged in a professional subdiscipline. That increased professionalization, and the recognition that presentist histories of economics are ahistorical enterprises, led, of course, to the creation of several journals in the history of economics and to the creation of several history of economics societies at about the same time. Similar moves were going on in psychology, sociology, and anthropology. However, in more recent times, as the institutional location of historians of economics in departments of economics has become perilous, the question of identity has re-emerged with the irritating recognition that economists really do not respect them very much (Weintraub 2007). Just as was the case in the earlier *HOPE* Conference volume, *The Future of the History of Economics* (Weintraub 2003), Backhouse and Fontaine can offer no more than a cautious and pessimistic conclusion:

> In view of these conflicting views, it is hardly a surprise that a growing number of historians of economics have commented about the directions the field should take at the same time as they have endorsed a let-a-thousand-flowers-bloom approach to the field. While some would like to see the lack of a clear identity for the field as a sign of its liveliness, richness, and even strength, it may equally be taken as the expression of its very uncomfortable position within academe. (p. 204)

Overall, this volume will be a sobering read for historians of economics. The editors, who have been at the forefront of efforts to contextualize postwar economics as one among the other social sciences, have indeed pointed to the historiographic similarities among those disciplines. It is uncomfortable, however, for economist-historians of economics to realize that the same identity problems that befuddle them are shared by their compatriots in at least anthropology, sociology, and psychology. More worrisome still, writing the history of postwar social sciences is being transformed with the entry of a new generation of historians of social science not wedded to the particular disciplines (Fontaine 2016), among them economics. If that movement continues apace, the question of identity faced by historians of economics will become more and more fraught.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1053837217000207 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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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