

【書評】

Michael H. Turk, *The Idea of History in Constructing Economics*

London and New York: Routledge, 2016, 242 pp.

This book is a very ambitious study, with the aim of clarifying two fundamental questions in the history of economic thought: how have economists tried to make economics 'scientific' and how it is possible to bridge economics and history? By tackling these crucial questions simultaneously, Turk concludes that economics could find a more proper grounding in history and that we could benefit from 'the re-constitution of historical economics updated to the 21st century.'

This work considers a wide range of economists, extending from the 18th to the 21st centuries and from Quesnay to Piketty in 10 chapters as follows:

1. The fault line of axiomatization:
Walras' linkage of physics with economics;
2. The mathematical turn in economics:
Walras, the French mathematicians, and the road not taken;
3. The arrow of time in economics: From Robinson's critique to the new historical economics;
4. Of puzzles and problems: A methodological challenge in economics from a philosophical dispute;
5. Economics pursuing the mold of evolutionary biology: "Accident" and "necessity" in the quest to make economics scientific;
6. Economics as plausible conjecture;
7. Max Weber and the lost thread of historical economics;

8. Historical proof in economics;
9. The fraught relation between economics and economic history: Matters of measurement and method;
10. Toward a positive construction of historical economics.

Questions about the scientism of economics are discussed mainly in chapters 1–6, which were published as articles during 2006–2012, except for chapter 4. The questions about the linkage between economics and history are discussed in chapters 7–10, which are newly written. Readers will be impressed by Turk's extensive knowledge across so many trains of thought, controversies, and interpretations, both in the fields of the history of economic thought and economic history itself.

The book begins with Léon Walras, for economics as a science emerged with the marginal revolution. It marks a striking difference from the emphasis between economy and history contained in Turgot's, Smith's, and Marx's political economy. Turk shows how Walras's attempts to make economics a 'science' by analogizing it with classical mechanics were mistaken, and suggests how this decisive failure, which would predestine the method of neoclassical economics, could have been avoided if Walras had understood properly the ideas of contemporary French mathematicians, including Poincaré, from whom Walras asked advice about the possibility of mathematizing economics. Part of the

title of chapter 2, 'The road not taken,' implies that these mathematicians, who were rightly aware of the limited role of mathematics, could have paved another road for neoclassical economics in both approach and conceptualization.

For those who sought to make economics scientific by linking it to mechanics, the real problem was that classical mechanics itself was already in decline. From this viewpoint, the book explores various challenges by other economists. Turk deals with a considerable number of topics, so I only refer here to the essential ones in my opinion. Chapter 3 deals mainly with how Joan Robinson tackled the role of 'time' in economics in relation to the theory of imperfect competition and its current significance. Chapter 4 focuses on Mary Morgan's reference to the necessity of identifying an economic narrative in economic situations. Chapter 5 shows how a relation between economics and evolutionary biology has been sought, beginning with Marshall and Veblen. Chapter 6 even explores the role of literature and fiction in the 18th century's history of economics.

I dare say that the most important 'player' in this book is Max Weber in chapter 7. In particular, Weber's attitude towards neoclassical economics is indispensable in explaining how economics can be better grounded in history. Turk explains Weber's complicated critique of economic abstraction and his method of idealized fiction, which does not need to be mathematical. According to Weber, an abstract theory fabricates the presence of specific qualities in empirical men, even if they are either absent or only partially present in

reality: perfect knowledge, absolute rationality, etc. Interestingly, Turk points out that this criticism bears a striking resemblance to the advice of Poincaré to Walras about mathematising economics.

On the other hand, Weber defended the theory of marginal utility as an economic construct, because it was ultimately a cultural fact in a capitalist society. Weber's approach was intended to identify economic activity as part of culture, which actually requires a historical perspective to be understood. Turk emphasizes that Weber rejected a disciplinary division based upon the distinction between the nomothetic and the ideographical, and that he rather suggested the importance of meaning and interpretation. It is interesting that in the last chapter, Turk points out the striking resemblance between Weber's method of ideal types and Piketty's narrative method as a type of intensification.

As a specialist in Walras, I was intrigued to discover his role in this study. Turk explains that Poincaré's advice to Walras over the possibility of mathematising economics was not just about the measure of utility, but about the limitations of a mechanistic view of science in general. I am impressed that this explanation plays an important role in this book. On the other hand, it is regrettable that this work ignores Walras's methodology of linking pure to applied economics or the concept of history in his social economics. This perspective might contribute to identifying another 'road not taken' by 20th century neoclassical economists.

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