

Kevin Deane and Elisa Van Waeyenberge, eds., *Recharting the History of Economic Thought*, (London: Red Globe Press, 2020), pp. 341, \$78.95 (paperback). ISBN: 9781137605245.

The collection of essays edited by Kevin Deane and Elisa Van Waeyenberge, *Recharting the History of Economic Thought*, could as easily have been titled “retabling” the history of economic thought. A handful of its chapters (4, 8, 9, 14) include tables comparing approaches to economics on their key intellectual features. By contrast, there are no notable charts in the book. It is instructive to think about the work tables do because the answer speaks to the spirit and uses of this book. Tables classify. Tables put side by side entities (authors, theories, subdisciplines) and encourage us to give language to their commonalities, but mainly to notice their distinctiveness. The dominant theme of this book is to work out difference. Difference is the animus of every essay, typically starting with a grand question, then giving the mainstream economics answer followed by the answers of alternative approaches. Add all those differences together and we get the core lesson that there is a myriad of ways of doing economics that an unyielding orthodoxy has hidden from us.

The origin story of the book is told by one of the editors. In 2013, while Deane was teaching at the University of Northampton, he was charged with redesigning a course on the history of economic thought. He began by teaching the course “chronologically,” but as this first attempt “failed,” he settled on a “thematic” format. The collection is not Deane's lecture notes or even lecture notes he used in that course. Rather it is original essays written by early- and mid-career scholars, most of whom with connections to London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), one of the UK's thriving centers for critical thinking in economics. The story of the Northampton course is not some quirky biographical prompt. The story is told to encourage us to see the book as a response to grassroots student activism. The book's royalties are donated to the student-run society, Rethinking Economics Network.

In the years following the 2007–08 financial crisis, there was a window of opportunity for renewal in economics teaching as an eloquent and assertive collective of students claimed a greater say on their education. Groups all over the world campaigned to broaden economics teaching, and learning about the history of their discipline was among their demands. As that

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window is now closing—possibly briefly, possibly for a long time, hard to tell—I am tempted to read this book as a progress report of what that fight for freedom to learn has given us.

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Recharting is a collection designed to destabilize the undergraduate economics introduction course. This is evident in format and in content. Although the book is sized as a research monograph, it is promoted as a textbook, and its pages are filled with mostly didactic prose and simple illustrations. Chapters include textbook-like “boxes” to frame ancillary discussions. Chapters end with further readings and questions for classroom debate. The content shadows the structure of a principles course hitting the key concepts of: supply (ch. 4, by Susan Newman), demand (ch. 5, by Mary Robertson), equilibrium (ch. 6, by Rob Calvert Jump), distribution (ch. 7, by Jo Mitchell), money (ch. 8, by Peter Hughes and Annina Kaltenbrunner), value (ch. 9, by Marco Veronese Passarella), and “more applied questions” such as crisis (ch. 10, by Bruno Bonizzi and Jeff Powell), growth (ch. 11, by Chakib Bourayou and Elisa Van Waeyenberge), development (ch. 12, by Ewa Karwowski and Elisa Van Waeyenberge), gendered work (ch. 13, by Hannah Bargawi), environment (ch. 14, by Ben Gorrom and Marta Taveli), and the state (ch. 15, by Shawky Arif). A good number of chapters have similar headings, including the recurring “Alternative Approaches,” even if what sits under these labels is chapter-specific.

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And yet this is almost-a-textbook, not a textbook. As often happens with essay collections with twenty authors, the chapters are not consistent in style, as you would demand from a mass-market single-authored textbook. For illustration, one need only compare Chapter 2 by Satoshi Miyamura on the assumption of rational optimizing agents, terse and packed with quotes, with Chapter 3 by Ourania Dimakou on the role of mathematics in economics, a chapter that is discursive and narrative. Although the book is not chronological, some chapters tell a story from past to present, while others go present to past and a few go back and forth. But the inconsistency between chapters is most evident in the end-of-chapter contents. A few of the contributors did not put much effort into creating questions for classroom discussion and several offer no further reading or very few suggestions.

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I do not feel competent to assess how this book will speak to first-year students in economics in the UK or elsewhere. I have not taught students with that profile for over a decade and I

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should not assume that they have remained as I knew them. The authors of the collection have far better expertise on this matter. The book seems, mostly, accessible in language and in range. Having indignation on its side, it will also be gripping. To my eyes it is too densely packed with information, but this only means it was not intended to be read as I read it, from page i to 302. It is perhaps best handled as a companion text to be read partially, strategically, and with classroom support.

This review is not an assessment of the collection, which would require singling out chapters and setting them against a standard that they did not set out to meet. I want to share with the reader two observations prompted by reading the book. One is to note that there is no equivalent volume issued from the ranks of historians of economics. Those who would publish in this journal and identify primarily as historians have not written textbooks or books that address directly the concerns and aspirations of the Rethinking Economics generation. That is not to say that historians of economics have been in hibernation for the past decade and a half. It would be easy to document how individual scholars' sense of calling was tugged by the events of the financial crisis and its aftermath. Collectively, the Young Scholars Initiative of the Institute of New Economic Thinking (but not Rethinking) has changed the geography and demography of our discipline, empowering a forceful and creative cohort of young historians, many of them in Latin America. And yet, the financial crisis of 2007–08 caused no major reorientation in the research agenda of the history of economics. It led to no renaissance in teaching in the field, and certainly no bump in employability. Reading this book, I am thus reminded of a lost opportunity for self-examination and for elevating our work. If self-examination is ongoing, it is of recent vintage and impelled by the agendas of inclusion and diversity, not by a crash in economics's public credibility.

The second observation is that the day has passed when economics dissenters and historians could count themselves as allies. There was a time when the two communities were close, sometimes overlapping in personnel. That feeling of closeness was forged by a shared grievance of being targets of hostility and discrimination by the discipline's elite. This collection demonstrates how far we have traveled from that time of common purpose. What am I reading in this book that warrants such despair?

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We can start with the introduction. The editors readily admit to sacrificing historical context as a "trade-off to support pluralistic teaching." The use of microeconomic jargon, a slip into conventional thinking to throw out context with the bathwater, is not ironic, it is tragic. What is gained and lost by dropping context? What is gained is the remaking of place and time into mere coordinates, unburdened by their substantive value. The construction of pluralistic teaching is thus a project of telescoping intellectual change. Neoclassicals are here, there, and everywhere neoclassicals, and Marxists are now, before, and always Marxists. An appreciation of context would make the tables too long and the boundaries of difference too porous. The gain is a cleaned-up picture of the combat of ideas. The cost is the loss of historical curiosity.

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I have already mentioned the end-of-chapter classroom questions. The questions invite students to explore the analytical differences between the approaches introduced in each chapter. Not one question encourages exploration of the past as a foreign land. In this respect, this book is no different from all other principles of economics books that treat history as old ideas, some good, some bad, fully distilled into the latest version of doctrine (orthodox or heterodox). Historians are committed to a different vision, one where the past is a lively itinerary of epistemic practices that can enlighten us about our times. By folding the past into the present, this book harms the cause of securing and expanding the teaching of history in the curriculum.

It is therefore no surprise that in the "further reading" final section of each chapter, students are not encouraged to read histories. The authors of the chapters have not read them, either. The exception is perhaps Dimitris Milonakis and Ben Fine's 2008 book *From Political Economy to Economics: Method, the Social and the Historical in the Evolution of Economic Theory*, a jeremiad on economics's path towards a monolithic present, which is mentioned in several chapters. It is possible that many of these authors have not had the benefit of sitting a course on the history of economics when they were students. The book deserves to bear the disclaimer that "no historical writing was harmed in the writing of this book." To my eyes this collection is another contribution to a flourishing genre of books written about the history of economics without histories or historians.

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We have before us a charged debate over the shape of the economics curriculum where conventional and critical economists *agree* to dismiss the work of historians of economics seeking to carve out new idioms and agendas for their field. I am saddened that the two communities have drifted apart, and I can think of only one institutional setting—
Management Studies at Goldsmiths—where there is a serious possibility of closing this widening gap. My worry is not for the status of our field of history but for the intellectual loss to our dissenting comrades missing out on all the excellent work done on the pages of this journal. So much of the book seemed to me predictable, old wine in new bottles, a book older than its copyright date. History is not the old doctrinal texts; it is what happens here.

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