REVIEW ARTICLES

American Textbooks in European Economic History during the Last Fifty Years

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The subject before us — a survey of American textbooks in the field of European economic history during the last fifty years — requires at the outset both clarification and elaboration. In the first place we need to say a word about the nature of textbooks and about the role which they play in educational instruction in American colleges.[1] A textbook (*manuel de classe*) is a volume chosen by the professor which every member of a class must have for his own use (he may not substitute another of his own choice). The teacher assigns a certain number of designated pages from the textbook for a given class session. Students are responsible for studying these pages and when they come together in class the subject matter of the assignment will be discussed by them and elucidated by remarks or a lecture by the teacher. The variations on this procedure are, of course, numerous. Students may be given assignments from other books for « special reports »; the discussion method of operating may be abandoned if the size of the class is unwieldy, i. e., over forty; or combinations of these methods may be employed. In any case the textbook is a « package of basic information » which the student is expected to master.

Because the audience at which textbooks are aimed is young and unin-

[1] We are limiting this statement to colleges, for European economic textbooks are are written only for use in colleges. The term « college » leads to some confusion in Europe, for there the word has other connotations than in the United States. In America the college is a four year educational institution where young persons go after high school. Typically they are for persons from seventeen to twenty-one years of age. The college forms part of the American system of « higher education », but the latter term covers also post-graduate instruction, i. e., after college.

formed in European economic history, texts in this field are usually employed in the « introductory course », that is, in the first course in the subject, and less frequently in more advanced courses, which, incidentally are very few in the field with which we are concerned here. Consequently, the introductory text is invariably a broad survey of the subject, or a grand synthesis. Furthermore, these books are usually divided into chapters or sections in a manner that allows a given topic to be the object of a single class discussion or lecture. Lastly, these texts are designed to fit into a one or two term course of approximately forty-five class meetings per term, inclusive of periods for written examinations or « quizzes ».[2]

In addition to providing a basic amount of information and to being a pedagogic guide, the textbook plays another role in the American educational scheme of things. In the absence of any centrally regulated educational system (the control of education is in the hands of the individual states) and with colleges being of varying degrees of excellence, the textbook establishes a minimum standard of competence which the student is expected to attain. Then, too, the textbook provides support to the professor who may or may not be adequately trained in the material which he is teaching. With the growing number of students in college (it was 681,000 in 1922 or 8.27 per cent of the population from the age of eighteen years to twenty-one, 2,078,000 in 1946 or 20.8 per cent of the same age group, and 8,498,000 in 1970 or over fifty per cent of the same ages), many college professors are called upon to perform tasks for which they are ill prepared. And many students go to college, who have little competence or desire to acquire the knowledge or skills that are regarded as desirable. The textbook is a life-saver for both of these groups.

Because of the importance of the textbook in the American educational system and because of the attempt at mass education at the college level the market for textbooks is a large one. Consequently, both authors, who may be scholars of merit, and publishers, who may specialize in textbooks only, are attracted to the textbook trade for the financial rewards which are there for the successful book. The competition is, however, severe, for no book can have a quasi-monopolistic position because of the dictates of a central educational authority and there is always a chance that a new book will appeal to a large enough number of users to pay the initial costs of publication. Consequently the texts which appear in a given field are numerous, but the number, of course, varies in some proportion to the enrollment of students in a subject.

European economic history is not one of the areas of instruction which attracts vast numbers and it is, moreover, a relatively new subject in American colleges. The field did, however, develop rapidly after World War I,

[2] Such checks on the work of students in a given class are standard procedures in America.

owing largerly to an increased interest in European affairs, and especially in economic matters, such as war debts, reparations, hyperinflation, economic recovery, world trade, and then the depression. By the time of the entry of the United States in World War II, European economic history had such a large clientele that some ten texts had been published. The more important of these could count on sales of up to five thousand copies a year. They were:

HARRY ELMER BARNES, *Economic History of the Western World,* New York, Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1937, pp. 790.

ERNEST L. BOGART, *Economic History of Europe, 1760-1939*, New York, Longmans, Green, 1942, pp. 734.

WITT BOWDEN, MICHAEL KARPOVICH, and A. P. USHER, *Economic History of Europe*, New York, American Book Co., 1937, pp. 948.

SHEPARD B. CLOUGH and CHARLES W. COLE, *Economic History of Europe*, Boston, D. C. Heath Co., 1941, pp. 841. This work was revised in 1946 and again in 1952.

CLARENCE DAY, *Economic Development in Modern Europe*, New York, Longmans, Green, 1933, pp. 626.

HERBERT HEATON, *Economic History of Europe*, New York, Harper Bros., 1936, pp. 775.

MELVIN M. KNIGHT, HARRY ELMER BARNES, and H. E. FLÜGEL, *Economic History of Europe*, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1928, pp. 811.

FREDERICK L. NUSSBAUM, *History of Economic Institutions of Modern Europe; an Introduction to Der Moderne Kapitalismus of Werner Sombart,* New York, Crofts, 1933, pp. 448.

FREDERICK A. OGG, *Economic Development of Modern Europe*, New York, Macmillan Co., 1917. This book was revised in 1926. This edition had 657 pages.

Since World War II the number of new books in the field has been less than in the two decades preceding it, probably because existing texts still claimed a large part of the market. The leading texts published since 1945 are:

PAUL ALPERT, *Twentieth Century Economic History of Europe*, New York, Henry Schuman, pp. 466.

SHEPARD B. CLOUGH, *The Economic Development of Western Civilization*, New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1959. This work was published in a revised version in 1968 under the title *European Economic History: The Economic Development of Western Civilization*, pp. 623.

HEINRICH E. FRIEDLÄNDER and JACOB OSER, *Economic History of Modern Europe*, New York, Prentice-Hall, 1955, pp. 611.

DAVID LANDES, *Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1969, pp. 566.

ELIAS H. TUMA, *European Economic History. Tenth Century to the Present. Theory and History of Economic Change*, New York, Harper and Row, 1971, pp. 384.

In addition to these texts, books of readings from scholars in the field and of documents have been published and to some extent used as texts or as supplements to texts. These are:

FREDERIC C. LANE and JELLE C. RIEMERSMA, *Enterprise and Secular Change: Readings in Economic History*, Homewood, Ill., Homewood Press, 1953, pp. 556.

SHEPARD B. CLOUGH and CAROL MOODIE, *Economic History of Europe: Documents and Readings*, Princeton, Van Nostrand, 1965, pp. 192.

SHEPARD B. CLOUGH, THOMAS MOODIE, and CAROL MOODIE, *Economic History of Twentieth Century Europe*, New York, Harper and Row, pp. 384.

Several generalizations may be made about these works. They are all syntheses, or surveys, of how man attempted to satisfy his material wants through time, of techniques of production which he employed to this end, of institutions, that is, ways of doing things, which guided his actions, of attitudes which he held toward material well-being, of the distribution of goods and services through various strata of society and over space, and of the resources, both physical and human, which he had available for his use. Although they treat of different timespans (some begin with prehistoric times, others with the middle ages, others with modern times, some others with the industrial revolution, and one with the twentieth century), all deal with relatively long periods. All of them do, however, become more detailed as they come closer to our own experiences, for the history treated seems to have more pertinence to current decision-making as one approaches the present — a point of view that looms large in much of the historical work in America.

Another characteristic of these textbooks in European economic history is that they depict the past in such a way as to suggest that no drastic change is needed in the economic system, although all of them point out weaknesses which, at least by implication, can be remedied by minor surgery here and a little political-economic therapy there. In fact, these texts might be considered to be « safe » by the vast majority of potential users. They conform to the social and economic system that writers and publishers believe in or think that the public wants. Moreover, these books are mostly free of daring theories or hypotheses of any kind. Their points of view are, to use an expression from American jargon, well homogenized.

By almost the same measure the data contained in these works are highly standardized, as though the authors had used the same sources, or very similar and familiar ones. New scholarship is slow to appear in them, for the author who tries to cover all economic history from the first primeval ooze to the present has a vast amount of work with which to keep pace. Even when he has learned of some new discovery or of some new interpretation of events, he must wait until his publisher thinks that a new edition will be financially feasible and even then the publisher needs nearly two years to get a manuscript into book form and to the market. Indeed, as has been suggested for some other fields of history, it takes nearly fifteen years before new work finds its way into European economic history texts. This time-lag is, however, being reduced by the excellent journals in the field and by the many specialized studies which are continually appearing.[3]

Another general statement which may be made about these texts is that almost all of them were written by persons who were trained primarily in history rather than in economics. The exemptions were those produced by Clarence Day, Ernest Bogart, and Elias Tuma, although these men considered themselves to be economic historians and not economists. This fact has been the source of a division within the ranks of those who teach, write, or simply read texts in the field. Economists invariably claim that historians do not know enough economics to make proper or profound analyses of economic problems. They charge that economic histories, even most of those written by economists, have no central theme, are mere compilations of data to which no form has been given except that of a heap, and that they contain many generalizations which are not supported by evidence. They are also critical of the historian's hesitation to enumerate « causes » of events and think that the historian's penchant for pluri-causal explanations of observed economic phenomena is a dodge to shum serious analysis and not a cautionary measure to avoid simplistic cause and effect relationships. They also complain that periodization used by historians follows traditional political or cultural schemes of division rather than those based on economic changes. They have been unsympathetic to the vast syntheses which historians attempt, for they are accustomed in their own work to investigate specific subjects (and limited ones), like the business cycle, central banking, and prices determined by

[3] Incidentally the *Journal of Economic History* began to appear in 1940 and has been a great help in reducing the time-lag just mentioned. Annual meetings of the Economic History Association, which publishes the *Journal*, serves the same end. American authors have made ever greater use of European economic history reviews during the last fifty years, particularly the *English Economic History Review*.

supply and demand of some one product in a short period of time. In spite of everything, however, economists for the most part have not attempted to write books in European economic history and have continued to use the texts by historians.[4]

The criticisms leveled by economists at the European economic history texts written primarily by historians have not been ignored, nor have they been without effect. For one thing, historians have been quick to defend themselves. They claim that their works do have a central theme — how man has endeavored to meet his material needs at various periods of time, and that this is what economic history is all about. They hold that a textbook cannot be, by its very nature, and should not be, a detailed analysis of specific issues. Such studies have to be monographs and not syntheses. They claim, too, that they are not so ignorant of economic theory as economists are wont to believe, and that if they do not follow a given theory or a specific model it is because of their belief, or fear, or conviction, that the theory or model is not adequate or accurate enough to stand the test of what has happened — the model of what has already transpired. To substantiate their positions they point to the conflicting theories of economists, to the evolution of theory, and to the danger of applying theory built on the experience of one economy to the case of a different one, if the difference is only one of time. Historians insist that they are seeking « models » from reality and not from deductive logic.

As regards the charge that historians do not make precise, causal explanations of economic behavior, historians reply that their, professional experience has made them reticent to do so. They contends that in any complex social problem so many factors are involved that to select one of them, or even a few, to explain an issue may be creating an illusion of completeness that is not accurate. They cite in their support the forecasts made by economists which have gone awry because of the omission of some factor, like human expectations based on an unscientific human psychology or because of the assumption that men act rationally for their own good, or because some « great man » got power which he used for a wild-goose chase.

Finally, historians reply to economists that if they are not happy with the textbooks which exist, they should write some of the kind they want. That economists have in general shunned this challenge, historians maintain, is because either the demands of economists are unrealistic, or because eco-

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4 A classic presentation of the attitude of economists toward the typical European economic history text is that by R. M. Hartwell and Robert Higgs, both English scholars and historians, in a review article entitled *Good Old Economic History*, « American Historical Review », vol. 76, April 1971, pp. 467-474. Their attack is made upon David Landes', *Unbound Prometheus*.

See also William N. Parker, *From Old to New to Old in Economic History*, « Journal of Economic History », vol. XXI, no. 1, 1971, pp. 3-14.

nomists are not well enough informed about the past to undertake textbook writing, or because economists refuse the rather grubby job of digging out detailed information regarding what has happened throughout the ages.

The quarrel between economists and historians over the nature of economic history has not, however, been barren. It has contributed on the part of historians to make an effort to be better economists — to keep abreat of current economic theory and techniques of research. It has led economists, for their part, to a realization that they must learn more history and more of the historian's craft — that they must try their hand at digging out data from the records of the past, if only for therapeutic purposes. To be sure the twains have not met, and probably never will, but they are closer to each other than they were fifty years ago.

A closer look at individual books than we have thus far taken will clarify and substantiate much of what has been said thus far. At the beginning of our period one group of texts was definitely of the encyclopedic type. These were the books by Clarence Day, F. A. Ogg, and Ernest Bogart. The first and third of these authors were oriented toward economics; the second was primarily a political scientist. In their work the influence of the German historical school of economics was strong, for members of the generation to which these men belonged frequently went to Germany to study. Like their masters, they were not bent upon analysis but upon the amassing of information. The hope was that from all the data collected some light would emerge. Professor Bogart stated clearly in the preface to his text that he was attempting a « narrative and chronological account of the major activities of Britain, France, and Germany..., with side glances at Russia and Italy for recent years ». He actually produced a great compendium of data, organized by topics such as agriculture, industry, commerce, transportation, money and banking, labor, and population and welfare. He divided the period since the industrial revolution into three divisions, 1760-1870, 1870-1914, and 1914-1939. Clearly this type of economic history left much to be desired and almost everyone recognized it, including the market.

One of the earliest texts of the period which we are surveying was that by Melvin M. Knight, with the subsequent collaboration of Harry E. Barnes and H. E. Flügel. Knight had a strong interest in economics, some training in it, and a strong desire to produce a text which was economically knowledgeable. Moreover, the book was in a series edited by a well-known economist, Allyn Young, who did much to encourage Knight to make the book acceptable to economists. The path which Knight took was to stress commerce as the leading factor in economic development and to weave industry, money, banking, and all the rest into his story via the exchange of goods.

Still another gambit which historians took to meet the criticism of economists was to organize their material by economic institutions. The volume by Frederick Nussbaum was admittedly a condensation and translation of the work of the most famous of the institutionalists, *Der Moderne Kapitalismus* by Werner Sombart — a book which was having great success on the Continent at the time. Useful as it was for American scholars to have easy access to the main positions held by Sombart, the book did one great disservice in that it gave currency to the analogy between an organism and economic institutions. According to this authority both had births, a period of youth, full maturity, old age, and death. This process implies an automatic and inevitable course from beginning to end that, in my opinion, has no validity in the social sciences. We should be mindful that analogies are for purposes of illustration and not for purposes of proof.

The work of Harry Elmer Barnes was also in the tradition of institutional economics. He stated in the preface to his textbook: « The purely narrative and chronological approach has been supplemented by the more fundamental technique of institutional economics, as expounded by Veblen, Sombart, Weber, the Webbs, Tawney, the Hammonds, and others of their school ». Furthermore, Barnes emphasized recent history. « The most sweeping economic changes since the dawn of history have taken place in the last two centuries. This necessitates the devotion of what otherwise might seem a disproportionate space to economic development in modern times. Much more than half of this book deals with economic history in the modern age, and this is as it should be ».

Barnes, writing in the depression years of the nineteen thirties, took a strong stand against finance capitalism and made a forecast regarding it. He contended that « mankind has been held back from the full enjoyment of this new age of material plenty and social leisure by the incompatibility between the aims and achievements of industrial technology and the motives and processes of finances capitalism. This deadlock constitutes the core of the contemporary crisis and creates the current paradox of want and starvation in the midst of plenty ».[5] He stated further that the days of monopoly and finance capitalism were numbered and that the political control of economic systems was the coming thing.[6] Finally, in his discussion of the currency economic crisis he abjured the usual pluricausal position of historians and attributed the deep depression to underconsumption. Such forecasts and such monocausal explanations were, as has been stated, rarely found in the textbooks under consideration here.

Of the three positions taken by the textbook writers just discussed, most subsequent authors followed the lead set by Knight. Pleas for such a course kept coming from many quarters — from E. A. J. Johnson, the first editor of the *Journal of Economic History*, from Wesley C. Mitchell and John Maurice Clark of Columbia University, from John H. Clapham of England,

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and from Ernest Labrousse of France. These scholars also called for greater quantification of economic data; and John Clapham even hoped that economic history would become the most precise of all branches of history because of the possibility of measuring economic phenomena.[7]

The force of these pleas was reflected in the fact that several universities created programs in economic history which included required work in both economics and history, and especially courses in the methods and techniques of economics. In some instances, moreover, the discipline of economic history became virtually independent of the departments of economics and history. The attempt to merge the two fields was mirrored in the fact that textbooks carried ever more statistical data in tables, graphs, and charts. Fortunately, economic historians had at their disposal ever more historical statistics thanks to the excellent publications of the League of Nations and subsequently of the United Nations, to the publication of national historical statistics in which the United States took the lead, and in statistical monographs prepared by private scholars.

This merging of economics and history was reflected clearly in all subsequent economic histories of Europe. It was apparent in the text by Bowden, Karpovitch, and Usher, in that by Herbert Heaton, in that by Charles W. Cole and myself, and most particularly in my *European Economic History; The Economic Development of Western Civilization.* All of these authors made an effort, with varying degrees of success, to familiarize themselves with economic theory, to use techniques employed by economists in their analyses, and to address themselves to economic problems. The concept of the great synthesis of economic behavior over considerable expanses of time was, however, maintained and this fact tended to perpetuate the strife between economists and historians. Economists still called for a central theme, for more analysis of specific issues, for a greater use of a « model », and especially for more specific weighting of and simplification of « causes » in explanation of the course of events. Finally, historians were frequently chided for not being « good economists » without any specifics given.

One of the most severe castigations of historians and their work of recent times was that by Hartwell and Higgs, to which reference has already been made, in their review article of *The Unbound Prometheus* by David Landes. He had written a section of the *Cambridge Economic History* on technological development from 1750 to 1870 and subsequently had expanded this work into a general textbook of European History from the industrial revolution to the present.[8] His original emphasis upon technology

[7] See his article in *Economic History*, « Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences ». Compare this with the article under the same title by DOUGLASS C. NORTH in the subsequent « International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences ».

[8] In addition to the review by Hartwell and Higgs see that by NATHAN ROSENBERG, « Journal of Economic History », vol. XXXI (1971), pp. 497-498.

seemed to imply that he considered this element to be paramount in economic development. Yet he explicity stated in his work that he wanted to explain economic change in all its complexity and to avoid presenting a simple explanation of this very intricate matter.[9]

In my own writing, I have come to grips with the same problems about which Landes has been badgered. So far as using economic theory is concerned, I have employed it, as I would any set of hypotheses, as suggestive of issues to investigate; and I have used models to provide check lists of factors not to be ignored in my analysis. As a central theme, I have centered my attention primarily upon economic growth, which has been much in vogue since World War II, but for this I have been charged with closing my eyes to the short-comings of the capitalist system and for soft-pedaling the social aspects of economic development. As regards the problem of causation, I have developed a theory of « necessary concomitants » — of factors which are apparently required in any situation —, and to these factors I have endeavored to attach some weighting of each one's importance and to investigate the fortuitous timing with which they came together to effect economic change. If the results of this procedure are not satisfactory to economists, the reasons are that these colleagues want greater simplicity, are not happy with the extensive coverage of experience in broad syntheses, and do not always agree with the weighting given to economic factors in any one situation.

In recent years, economic history has been subjected to certain new currents which are beginning to be reflected in European economic history textbooks. One is to place more emphasis upon the role of population and other demographic phenomena in economic growth and decline, particularly in the predominantly agricultural economy of Europe prior to the nineteenth century, when the potential for growth was not so great as it was subsequently. Another has been a demand to give more attention to the social consequences of economic change — to give recognition to the fact that the end of economics is the material betterment of man and that the amassing of more goods and services is not an end in itself. A third new development has had to do primarily with teaching economic history and here we find some indication of the reduced use of textbooks, particularly in more advanced courses, the assignment to students of monographs for specific issues, the wider employment of collections of documents and readings from the masters, and the introduction of students to primary data.

The most notorious of the new currents in economic history is a movement variously called the new economic history, econometric history, or cliometrics. For the most part this movement is « old wine in new bottles ». Its protagonists have taken up many of the old cries which have been with us

[9] *The Unbound Prometheus*, pp. 539-540.

for a long time, but they have used new language and have presented their case with vigor. They frown upon the vague theories and unsubstantiated generalizations of the traditional economic historians, just as their forebears did. They want to recast history into rigorously specified and testable statements, which is another way of protesting against the syntheses which historians had considered to be the genus of economic history textbooks. And they want to formulate all explanations in the mold of valid, hypothetical, deductive models.[10]

One of the most controversial aspects of the new economic history is that it advocates « contra-factual history », that is, it believes that a valid area of economic historical research is to try to ascertain what might have happened if something had been different from what it was. For example, the new economic historians might investigate what would have been the effect on American gross national product if no investments had been made in American railroads from 1890 to 1900. Many in the field believe that such a proposition cannot be tested, for if one factor is withdrawn from the model of growth, all other factors will be so changed and their resulting character so speculative that the data with which one has to work can result in no trustworthy conclusions.[11]

The new economic history is obviously not easily applied to the writhing of textbooks, for it is antithetical to the concept of the great synthesis and its contra-factualism is certainly not for beginners who have so much to learn, if, indeed, it is for anyone. Yet some attempts have been made to employ it in the writing of American economic history texts, but they have taken the form of an initial statement of intent, the uttering of a few sounds of elementary economic theory, and the reference to a vague model. The remainder of the text is not much different from what was being produced before the movement began.[12] Undoubtedly the most constructive contribution of the new economic history has been to bring well-trained economists to economic history.

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[10] See the presentation of their position by ROBERT FOGEL, *The New Economic History: Its Findings and Methods*, « The Economic History Review », Dec. 1966, especially pp. 642-643. See also his *The Specification Problem in Economic History*, « Journal of Economic History », vol. XXVII (Sept. 1967), pp. 283-308.

[11] One of the ablest critics of the new economic history has been FRITZ REDLICH. See his *'New' and Traditional Approaches to Economic History and Their Interdependence*, « Journal of Economic History », vol. XXV (Dec. 1965), pp. 480-495.

[12] See particularly LANCE E. DAVIS, JONATHAN R. T. HUGHES, and DUNCAN M. MCDOUGALL, *American Economic History: The Development of a National Economy*. Homewood, Illinois: R. D. Irwin, 1961. The last edition was published in 1969.

In European economic history, see ELIAS H. TUMA, *European Economic History. Tenth Century to the Present. Theory and History of Economic Change*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971, X, pp. 384. Incidentally, the new economists seem to be reintroducing the « stage theory » of growth in their presentations, with set factors by rigid time spans. This brittle view is ahorrent to historians.

If controversy is an indication of intellectual health, then American economic history is in the « pink ». The more extreme positions of present partisans of this set of tenents or of that are not, however, changing very profoundly American textbooks in European economic history. The textbook continues to be the great synthesis. It does, however, seek to achieve greater competence and creditability by bringing economics and history closer together. It endeavors to give due attention to all factors pertinent by logic and relevance to the issue being treated. It takes into its purview not only economic phenomena, but much from demography, psychology, politics, and culture that impinge upon change. It reflects the American effort to stress the science of man and not just a part of man's life.[13]

[13] On this point see, DAVID S. LANDES and CHARLES TILLY, *History as Social Science.* Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971, pp. 152. See also the review of this book by THOMAS COCHRAN, in the « American Historical Review », vol. 76, (Dec. 1971), pp. 1515-1516.