

# WHAT IS A BOOK REVIEW? THE CASE OF ECONOMICS

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# What is a Book Review? The Case of Economics

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Abstract: This article identifies the two approaches to defining a book review. The first defines a book review as a text published in the 'Book Reviews' section of a journal. The second approach involves specifying criteria that a text must satisfy to qualify as a book review and assessing whether a given text satisfies these criteria. This second approach reveals a significant overlap between book reviews and other types of publications in economics, such as encyclopedia entries, prefaces, review essays, and review articles.

JEL codes: B20, Y30

Keywords: book reviews, economics journals, classification, publications, editors, review essays

Studies in economic methodology and the history of economics that examine texts they classify as 'book reviews' often focus on texts that were not published in a journal's designated 'Book Reviews' section. For example, Frank Hyneman Knight's 1940 article, "'What is Truth in Economics?'" published in the *Journal of Political Economy*, has been the subject of numerous studies (Emmett, 2009; Hammond, 1991; Hart, 2010) and is frequently presented as a review of Terrence Wilmot Hutchison's *The Significance and Basic Postulates of Economic Theory* (1938). Knight himself referred to his text as a review of Hutchison's book (1940, p. 1), and Hutchison did the same in his response to Knight (1941, p. 732). However, "'What is Truth in Economics?'" was not included among the nineteen texts in the 'Book Reviews' section of the issue in which

it appeared; instead, it was placed in the ‘Articles’ section (JPE Editorial Board, 1940, p. iii). This raises the question: can Knight’s text be considered a book review?

The fact that this text is dedicated to analyzing the content of a specific book—and that both the text’s author and the book’s author agree in considering it a review—may justify considering it as such. In this case, the categorization chosen by the *Journal of Political Economy* editor does not matter. Conversely, if one adheres strictly to the editor’s categorization, then “‘What is Truth in Economics?’” cannot be considered a book review.<sup>1</sup> This demonstrates that, depending on the chosen approach, the same text may or may not be considered a book review.

This article examines the two approaches to defining book reviews, emphasizing the overlap between book reviews and other types of publications in economics, such as review essays, encyclopedia entries, and prefaces. In doing so, this article makes three contributions. First, it clarifies the definition of a ‘book review’ and questions the distinctions between different types of publications in economics. Second, it compiles a series of facts and examples about book reviews in a context where these publications have been relegated to the background in economic methodology and the history of economics. Finally, it contributes to the existing literature on book reviews (East, 2011; Gorraiz et al., 2014; Hartley, 2010; Hérubel, 2021), as this literature has paid little attention to what can be considered a book review outside the texts included in the ‘Book Reviews’ sections of journals.

The structure of this article is as follows. The first section examines the two approaches to defining book reviews. The second section evaluates the relevance of using a time gap criterion—the period between a book’s publication and the text analyzing it—to define a book review. The third section examines the criterion related to text length.

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<sup>1</sup> This contrast is particularly amusing, given that Frank Hyneman Knight, alongside Jacob Viner, served as the editor of the *Journal of Political Economy* at the time.

The fourth section investigates the role of criteria concerning the chronology of the text and the contribution to the book. The fifth section concludes.

## 1 The Two Approaches to Defining a Book Review

There are two approaches to defining a book review. The first approach considers a book review as a text published in the 'Book Reviews' section of a journal. Under this approach, "'What is Truth in Economics?'" would not be considered a book review. The second approach involves identifying specific criteria that a text must satisfy to qualify as a book review and assessing whether a given text satisfies these criteria.

For instance, a book review can be defined as a relatively short text written by one or more individuals who did not contribute to the book under review, published shortly after the book's release, providing an overview of its content, and possibly including an analysis of specific aspects and/or a critical evaluation of its contributions and place within the literature. This definition also encompasses cases where multiple books are reviewed together, referred to as 'books review.' While alternative definitions are possible, this definition aligns with existing studies on book reviews (e.g., Berry, 1994; Hartley, 2010) and with the 'Suggestions to Reviewers' guidelines provided by economics journals examined during this research. For example, consider the document sent in 1957 by the *Journal of Farm Economics* (now the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*) to individuals invited to write a book review.<sup>2</sup>

### Journal of Farm Economics

#### Suggestions to Reviewers

We are pleased that you are willing to review the enclosed book. If you are not familiar with the format of the Journal, you may find the following suggestions helpful:

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<sup>2</sup> Duke Library, Rubenstein Library, Marc L. Nerlove papers, 1930-2014/Box 36/Implications of Friedman's Permanent Income Hypothesis for Demand Analysis, 1957-1958.

### Form of the Review

In your review, please include both (a) a brief statement of the book's subject matter and main conclusions and (b) your own critical appraisal of its merits and shortcomings. Mere summary of contents should, of course, be kept to a minimum.

Please avoid careless sentence structure and unduly long sentences.

If quotations from, and page citations to, the book are used, please check carefully against the original text for accuracy of spelling, punctuation and numbers. After sending you the book, it is difficult (and sometimes impossible) for us to do such checking.

### Length

Most reviews average between two and three double spaced, typewritten pages.

[...]

### Promptness

Since timeliness is a desirable characteristic of a book review, we would appreciate reasonable promptness in receiving your manuscript. Needless to say, however, the first objective is quality.

Selection of books for review is not always based upon thorough knowledge or examination. If, upon closer study, you strongly feel that the particular book assigned to you is too poor to warrant a review, we would appreciate your writing us to say so.

— Review Editor

For this definition to be operational, it is necessary to clarify elements such as 'relatively short' (does this mean a few lines, paragraphs, or pages?), 'shortly after' (within a month, a year, or a decade?), and 'who did not contribute' (does this exclude editors, series editors, or colleagues who reviewed the manuscript?). The

interpretation of these criteria directly influences whether “‘What is Truth in Economics?’” can be considered a book review.

If the second approach is adopted, the challenge lies in formulating a definition that encompasses a wide range of texts published in the ‘Book Reviews’ sections of economics journals, while also including texts published outside these sections—without being so broad that it encompasses all economics publications. As a matter of fact, a definition that excludes a significant number of texts labeled as book reviews would be problematic. Conversely, if the definition fails to account for texts published outside the ‘Book Reviews’ sections, the first approach—relying solely on journal categorization—would be sufficient. Additionally, an overly broad definition that includes most economics publications would render the concept meaningless by failing to capture any distinct characteristics.

Formulating such a definition is particularly challenging due to the considerable diversity of texts published in the ‘Book Reviews’ sections of economics journals, sometimes even within the same journal. These texts exhibit a wide range of characteristics, argumentative structures, and author intentions. A definition broad enough to encompass this diversity risks classifying numerous other types of publications as book reviews. On the other hand, an overly narrow definition would exclude many texts that, despite their differences, are explicitly published under the book review label.

The diversity of book reviews can be attributed to several factors. First, authors guidelines differ across journals. Focusing specifically on length, some journals publish reviews that are only a few lines long, offering little more than a summary of the book—these are sometimes referred to as ‘descriptive reviews’ (Smith, 2019). In contrast, other journals feature reviews spanning several pages, sometimes exceeding the length of articles published in the same issue. For instance, the fourth issue of volume 36 of *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, renowned for its discussion on the mathematization of economics (Gradoz, 2024), includes a four-page review by William

Jack Baumol (1954) of Milton Friedman's *Essays in Positive Economics* (1953), the well-known three-page article by Paul Anthony Samuelson, 'The Pure Theory of Public Expenditure' (1954), and the two-page article by David Novick, 'Mathematics: Logic, Quantity, and Method' (1954). Second, within the same journal, this diversity may result from the editor's intention not to standardize the published texts. For example, the 1959 version of the document 'Suggestions to Reviewers' from the *American Economic Review* explicitly states that it is not 'desired to reduce all reviews to a stereotyped form.'<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, as book reviews are often regarded as a 'service rendered' (Hérubel, 2020), editors may be reluctant to impose extensive revisions on authors to conform to a specific format.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the format of a book review often reflects the nature of the book itself.<sup>5</sup> Reviewing a textbook, a dictionary, a collective work, or a pamphlet is not the same thing, and it is unsurprising that the corresponding reviews exhibit significant variation. These observations raise broader questions about the overlap between book reviews and other types of publications in economics, which will be explored in the following sections.

## 2 The Time Gap Criterion

Can the entry in *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics* dedicated to John Maynard Keynes's *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936), published fifty-one years after the book's release (Milgate, 1987), be considered a book review?

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<sup>3</sup> The exact date of this document remains uncertain. It was discovered, undated, inserted between the first two pages of the copy of the book *International Economic Papers*, n°9 (Peacock et al., 1959), held at the Center for the History of Political Economy at Duke University. Since Sidney Weintraub authored the review of this book for the *American Economic Review* (Weintraub, 1960), and his son, Eliot Roy Weintraub, is a member of the Center, it is reasonable to infer that the document was likely sent by the *American Economic Review* to Sidney Weintraub in 1959 to assist him in preparing the review.

<sup>4</sup> In his concise history of the publications of the American Economic Association, Alfred William Coats (1969, p. 63) emphasizes that Paul Thomas Homan, who served as editor of the *American Economic Review* from 1941 to 1951, commanded great respect among his peers. This esteem greatly facilitated positive responses to his requests and, consequently, the acquisition of book reviews for the journal.

<sup>5</sup> 'Occasionally a book appears upon which a book review of typical length does not serve much useful purpose, either because the book is encyclopedic in character or because it raises issues which cannot be given meaningful discussion in such little space' (Long, 1954, p. 72).

According to the first approach, the answer is no. According to the second approach, it depends on how one interprets the criterion of being ‘published shortly after the book’s release.’ If this time gap is considered compatible with half a century, then the encyclopedia entry could be considered a book review under the second approach, as it offers a summary of the book complemented by critical analysis, is relatively short, and is authored by someone uninvolved in the book’s creation—therefore satisfying all criteria of the proposed definition. Of course, using an alternative definition or specification could lead to not considering this text as a book review.

Conversely, if a book review is expected to be published within a few months or years after the book’s release, this encyclopedia entry would not qualify as a book review. Accepting this stricter criterion would also imply that Joseph Louis François Bertrand’s (1883) analysis of Antoine-Augustin Cournot’s *Recherches sur les principes mathématiques de la théorie des richesses* (1838), published in the *Journal des savants*’ ‘Book Reviews’ section—where the ‘Bertrand model’ was first outlined (Baye & Kovenock, 2018)—would not qualify as a book review under the second approach.

Building on this idea, what about texts published in ‘Book Reviews’ sections that discuss translations, reeditions, paperback republications, or reprints? For instance, Cournot’s book was translated into English in 1897 with a five-page preface and an annotated bibliography by Irving Fisher (Cournot, 1897). One might argue that a translation constitutes a new book, therefore resetting the time gap. However, it is noteworthy that reviews published at the time did not focus on the quality of the translation, preface, or bibliography but rather on Cournot’s original arguments from sixty years earlier (Edgeworth, 1898; Merritt, 1898). This raises the question: should these reviews be considered assessments of the 1838 original or the 1897 English edition? Depending on the answer and the chosen time gap criterion, they may or may not be classified as book reviews under the second approach, even though they fit the first approach’s definition. The question becomes even more complex with subsequent reprints. For instance, the book was reprinted in 1927, with the addition of the article

‘Cournot and Mathematical Economics’ by Irving Fisher (1898), published in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, serving as a second preface. The same question arises: should the reviews published at that time (Hotelling, 1928; Macgregor, 1929; Ricci, 1929) be considered reviews of the 1838 book, of two texts from the late 1890s, or of a 1927 book? The answer to this question will vary depending on who is asked, and there is no definitive answer.<sup>6</sup> This simply highlights the existence of ‘borderline cases’ when introducing a time gap criterion in the definition of a book review. Such borderline cases are not isolated occurrences, as many books undergo multiple reissues, reprints, or paperback editions over time.<sup>7</sup> Several publishers have even established collections dedicated to reprinting out-of-print works, such as *Routledge Revivals*. Some journals explicitly avoid reviewing these books. For example, in the document ‘Guidelines for Selecting Books to Review’, the editor of the *Journal of Economic Literature* specifies: ‘We avoid volumes that collect previously published papers unless there is some material value added from bringing the papers together. Also, we refrain from reviewing second or revised editions unless the revisions of the original edition are really substantial’ (JEL Editorial Board, 1992, p. vi).

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<sup>6</sup> ‘*Banks and Politics in America* was first published in 1957. In reviewing the 1991 reissue of the paperback version, one is faced with the question is there much new to be learned from the book after 35 years?’ (Moen, 1993, p. 386).

<sup>7</sup> Consider the example of William Jack Baumol’s (1977) review of *The Role of Providence in the Social Order: An Essay in Intellectual History* by Jacob Viner (1977), written upon the book’s paperback reissue five years after its original publication in 1972. Similarly, William Harbold’s (1958) review of *Legal Foundations of Capitalism* by John Rogers Commons was published at the time of the book’s reprint (1957), thirty-three years after its initial release in 1924. Another example is John Gerow Gazley’s (1952) review of *London Life in the XVIIIth Century* by Dorothy George (1951), written when the book was reprinted as a facsimile edition—containing the errors of the original version—twenty-six years after its first publication in 1925. Reviews characterized by significant time gaps offer opportunities to reflect on the reception of the book. For instance, in his review of *Imperialism and Social Classes* by Joseph Alois Schumpeter (1951)—comprising a text from 1919 and a text from 1927—Bert Frank Hoselitz writes: ‘Rather than write a review of the book, it appears therefore proper to appraise the influence of Schumpeter’s work on imperialism and social classes from the vantage point of the present and to examine how well the theories expressed by him roughly a quarter of a century ago stand up in the light of more recent history and research’ (1951, p. 360). This raises the question: can such a text still be considered a book review despite its placement in the ‘Book Reviews’ section of a journal?

While the time gap criterion can certainly be debated, it is difficult to abandon it entirely without significantly broadening the scope of what qualifies as a book review. Without this criterion, not only some encyclopedia entries but also numerous works in the history of economics and economic methodology could be considered as book reviews. For instance, if we accept the common assertion that “‘What is Truth in Economics?’” constitutes a book review, it follows that texts as long as thirty-two pages may be considered book reviews (see *infra*). Consequently, without a time gap criterion, articles in the history of economics or economic methodology—provided they are shorter than thirty-two pages—and dedicated to works such as *The Wealth of Nations*, *Das Kapital*, or *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities*, could also be considered as book reviews. One might argue that such books, given their recognition, are not merely summarized in articles but are instead examined with a focus on specific aspects. Therefore, these articles would not satisfy the previously established definition of a book review, which requires a summary of the book’s content. However, the situation is different for lesser-known or even unpublished books, such as newly discovered manuscripts in archives, which are typically summarized to familiarize readers with their content. In the absence of a time gap criterion, such works in the history of economics or economic methodology would then be considered book reviews, leading to an excessively broad definition that encompasses a wide array of publications not traditionally regarded as book reviews.

### 3 The Text Length Criterion

Can the text ‘Reading About the Financial Crisis: A Twenty-One-Book Review’ (Lo, 2012), which reviews twenty-one books on the 2007–2008 financial crisis, be considered a book review? Its title strongly suggests so. While reviewing twenty-one books in a single text may seem unusual, it is not uncommon for texts published in the ‘Book Reviews’ sections of economics journals to cover multiple books—two, three, or even six (e.g., Diebold, 1953). However, Lo’s text was published in the ‘Articles’ section of

the *Journal of Economic Literature*, rather than in its ‘Book Reviews’ section (JEL Editorial Board, 2012, p. 3). According to the first approach, Lo’s text cannot be considered a book review. Under the second approach, its length—twenty-eight pages—raises some questions.

As previously noted, most texts published in the ‘Book Reviews’ sections range from a few lines to a few pages. When a review exceeds a certain length—determined at the editor’s discretion—it is often reclassified under a different label, reformatted, or even rejected. The question, then, is whether this label is specific to long book reviews. Consider, for example, a hypothetical journal with a dedicated section titled ‘Long Book Reviews,’ specifically designed for these extended texts. In this situation, the first approach could be adjusted to define a book review as any text published in the ‘Book Reviews’ or ‘Long Book Reviews’ sections of an economics journal. The closest real-world equivalent to such a section is the ‘Review Essays’ section found in journals such as *Æconomia*. Review essays are often described as ‘extended book reviews’ (Pinzón-Fuchs et al., 2021) or ‘long book reviews’ (Edwards et al., 2024). However, as the name suggests, nothing obliges a ‘review essay’ to focus solely on a book. It can address a concept, an article, a legal text, or a methodology. Therefore, determining whether such sections exclusively publish book-related content would require a case-by-case examination of journals, ensuring in addition that their editorial policies remain stable over time. Amending the first approach would then involve defining a book review as a text published in the ‘Book Reviews’ section of an economics journal or within the ‘Review Essays’ sections of *Journal X* from year A to year B, *Journal Y* from year C to year D, *Journal Z* from year E to year F, and so forth. While this approach is feasible when dealing with a limited number of journals, scaling it to compile a comprehensive database of book reviews in economics presents considerable difficulties.

Most of the time, long texts dedicated to reviewing a book are published in the ‘Articles’ section of economics journals rather than in a dedicated section. This is the case with “‘What is Truth in Economics?’” Another example is John Richard Hicks’s

book *A Revision of Demand Theory* (1956). Reviews of this book by George Joseph Stigler (one page), Ralph William Pfouts (one page), Heinz Gollnick (two pages), and Pierre Dieterlen (two pages) appeared in the 'Book Reviews' sections of the *Journal of Political Economy*, *Southern Economic Journal*, *Review of World Economy*, and *Revue économique*. In contrast, Kelvin John Lancaster's (1957) article 'Revising Demand Theory' (seven pages) and Fritz Machlup's (1957) article 'Professor Hicks' Revision of Demand Theory' (seventeen pages) were published in the 'Articles' sections of *Economica* and the *American Economic Review*, despite the fact that both journals had a 'Book Reviews' section at the time. The texts by Lancaster and Machlup satisfy all the criteria of the previously mentioned definition, as long as the length criterion is considered compatible with a seventeen-page text. Therefore, under the second approach, these two texts can be considered book reviews, but not under the first.

If the goal is to create the most comprehensive database of book reviews in economics, including such articles, the question arises: is there an automated way to distinguish these articles from those that do not review a book? If not, manually reviewing each article in every issue of every journal would be required. While it might be feasible by focusing on one or two journals, although tedious, scaling up to a larger set of journals would be nearly impossible. Therefore, is there an automated method to distinguish 'Revising Demand Theory,' 'Professor Hicks' Revision of Demand Theory,' or "'What is Truth in Economics?'" from articles that do not review a book?

First, article titles are not a reliable indicator. While Machlup's title explicitly mentions Hicks and the title of his book, the same cannot be said for Lancaster and Knight. Based solely on their titles, there is no indication that these two articles review a book. Furthermore, if we aimed to automatically include Machlup's article in our database, we would first need to compile a comprehensive list of the titles of published economics books and their authors' names, then search for matching (*book title, authors' names*) pairs within article titles. In addition to being highly labor-intensive, this approach would likely yield limited results, as few articles follow this convention.

Some examples from the *American Economic Review* include ‘Professor Hayek on *The Pure Theory of Capital*’ (Smithies, 1941), ‘Professor Pigou’s *Employment and Equilibrium*’ (Samuelson, 1941), and ‘Schumpeter’s *History of Economic Analysis*’ (Viner, 1954). Similar cases can be found in the *Economic Journal* and *Economica*. However, even among articles that do follow this convention, slight variations in book titles are common, making this technique ineffective. For example, the article ‘Patinkin’s *Integration of Monetary and Value Theory*’ (Fellner, 1956) reviews the book *Money, Interest and Prices: An Integration of Monetary and Value Theory* by Don Patinkin (1956). Since the article title does not exactly match the book title, it would likely be overlooked using this technique. Similarly, Hicks’s book title *A Revision of Demand Theory* differs slightly from Machlup’s article title, which omits the initial ‘A,’ potentially leading to missed detections. Moreover, in many cases, the title of an article reviewing a book simply replicates the book’s title (Denison, 1964; Vining, 1959; Watkins, 1962). If we merely try to detect the presence of a book title in the title of an article based on a database of published book titles in economics, we would encounter numerous false positives. For example, many articles containing the expression ‘Price Theory’ could mistakenly be considered as reviews of *Price Theory* (Weintraub, 1949), which would be incorrect. This is why article titles are not a reliable indicator.

A common feature among the articles by Knight, Machlup, and Lancaster is the inclusion of a footnote on the first page providing the full bibliographic reference of the book under review. In Knight’s case (*Journal of Political Economy*), the footnote is attached to the article title and reads: ‘Review of T. W. Hutchison’s, *The Significance and Basic Postulates of Economic Theory*. London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1938. Pp. X+192.’ For Lancaster (*Economica*), the footnote is also attached to the title and states: ‘J. R. Hicks, *A Revision of Demand Theory*, Oxford University Press. 1956. vii+196 pp. 18s. net.’ In Machlup’s article (*American Economic Review*), the footnote is linked to the first sentence—‘The “demand theory” which Hicks is revising in his new book<sup>1</sup>’—and reads: ‘J. R. Hicks, *A Revision of Demand Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1956. Pp. vii,

196. \$3.75.).’ Mentioning the number of pages of a book, as well as its price (as seen in the cases of Lancaster and Machlup), is an uncommon bibliographic practice in articles. However, this format is the standard way of presenting books under review in texts published in the ‘Book Reviews’ sections of economics journals. By applying regular expressions and advanced conditions, and with access to the full text of articles, it would be possible to detect articles exhibiting this characteristic, thereby enabling their inclusion in a book reviews database.

In other words, if we follow the widely accepted view that ‘Revising Demand Theory,’ ‘Professor Hicks’ Revision of Demand Theory,’ and “‘What is Truth in Economics?’” qualify as book reviews—implying a flexible interpretation of the length criterion to accommodate texts of up to thirty-two pages—we also have a means of automatically identifying many articles published in the ‘Articles’ sections of economics journals that could reasonably be considered as book reviews. Of course, this criterion is not without limitations. Some articles that meet the definition of a book review under the second approach may be overlooked, while others might be mistakenly classified as book reviews. However, this approach offers the advantage of enabling the inclusion of numerous significant texts that are frequently referenced as ‘reviews’ in economic methodology and the history of economics. Finally, it is important to consider that abandoning the length criterion altogether could lead to classifying full-length books, such as *The Contradictions of Capital in the Twenty-First Century: The Piketty Opportunity* (Hudson & Tribe, 2016, 300 pages) and *Anti-Piketty: Capital for the 21st Century* (Delsol et al., 2017, 274 pages), as reviews of Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014). Ultimately, the definition of a book review—and the parameters used to establish it—will significantly influence the scope and inclusiveness of the resulting corpus of texts.

## 4 The Criteria Concerning the Chronology of the Text and the Contribution to the Book

Can Deirdre Nansen McCloskey's article 'The Rhetoric of Economics' (1983), published in the 'Articles' section of the *Journal of Economic Literature*, which precedes the publication of her book of the same title (McCloskey, 1986), be considered a review of her book? According to the first approach, the answer is no. Under the second approach, it is worth noting that the article succinctly presents the book's content—precisely the purpose of many texts published in the 'Book Reviews' sections of economics journals. However, since the article was authored by McCloskey herself and published prior to the book's release, one might argue that it should not be considered a review.

This example highlights certain 'borderline cases.' For instance, some introductions, even when written by the authors of the book, are regarded as reviews of the book: 'As introduction, Triffin begins with a review of the book written by himself' (Kamarck, 1958, p. 188).<sup>8</sup> This often occurs in books with a complex gestation process, where the introduction serves to justify the author's choices and revisit the book's content—sometimes with a critical perspective. In such cases, a text written by the authors and published simultaneously with the book is considered a review.

Similarly, in collective volumes, introductory or concluding chapters frequently provide an overview of the contributions by the editors, sometimes to the extent of overlapping with subsequent book reviews: 'D. H. Robertson begins the volume with an Introductory Note, which is such a penetrating and balanced review of the book, written in the always incomparable Robertsonian style, that any subsequent reviewer is bound to feel redundant and heavy-handed' (Tobin, 1958, p. 284).<sup>9</sup> Here again, a text

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<sup>8</sup> Likewise, 'The introduction [of Paul David] begins so much like an extended review of his book' (Deane, 1976, p. 740).

<sup>9</sup> Likewise, 'The last chapter is an excellent review of the book in which the editors distill in an interesting way the threads of thought woven by the authors throughout the diverse chapters' (French,

written by some authors of the book and published alongside the book is considered a review.

Moreover, prefaces or postscripts written by individuals not involved in the book's creation can, in many respects, be seen as commissioned reviews by the editors or authors: 'Mr. Price's Preface is really a review of the book itself' (Bonar, 1905, p. 98). As previously mentioned, Irving Fisher's review of Antoine-Augustin Cournot's book was later incorporated as the second preface when the book was reprinted in 1927. Should Fisher's text cease being considered a review simply because it was reclassified as a preface? Once again, the objective here is not to provide a definitive answer but to illustrate the fluid boundaries between book reviews and other types of publications in economics.

## 5 Conclusion

This article began by observing that in economic methodology and the history of economics, references to a 'book review' often pertain to texts that were not published in the 'Book Reviews' sections of economics journals. This raises a fundamental question: what precisely constitutes a book review? The simplest approach is to rely on the classification established by journal editors, defining a book review as any text published in the 'Book Reviews' section of an economics journal. However, this approach is not commonly adopted in studies within economic methodology and the history of economics. Instead, these studies tend to follow a second approach—identifying the defining characteristics of a book review and then assessing which texts satisfy these criteria. As demonstrated, any definition of a book review will inevitably exclude certain texts that were published under this label while including others that were not originally designated as book reviews. The challenge, therefore, lies in

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1989, p. 236), 'The essays are prefixed with a short introduction by the editor and conclude with a chapter, almost a review of the book, by John Langton' (Hoyle, 1999, p. 826) or 'I recommend that the reader return to the edition's introductory chapter for an excellent review of the book that places its contribution in the fuller context of the water marketing literature' (Parker, 2001, p. 249).

finding a suitable compromise. The existence of this effort to find a suitable compromise highlights the overlap between book reviews and other types of publications in economics, such as encyclopedia entries, prefaces, and review essays. In this context, we have identified a criterion that helps distinguish articles that review a book from those that do not. Future research will aim to develop a comprehensive database of book reviews in economics and conduct a bibliometric analysis of these often-overlooked texts. Key questions for investigation include: How many economics journals have published book reviews? How many book reviews are featured in each issue? For how long have these reviews been published? Which book reviews have received the highest citations in economics? Who are the economists who have authored the most book reviews?

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