

BOOK REVIEW

Marco P. Vianna Franco and Antoine Missemmer, *A History of Ecological Economic Thought* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2022), pp. 200, 120€ (hardcover). ISBN: 9780367363925.

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Marco P. Vianna Franco and Antoine Missemmer's book is a welcome addition to the growing literature on the history of environmental or ecological economic thought. This socially relevant literature in the history of thought includes Erhun Kula's (1998) *History of Environmental Economic Thought*, Margaret Schabas's (2005) *The Natural Origins of Economics*, and Nathaniel Wolloch's (2016) *Nature in the History of Economic Thought*. What makes Franco and Missemmer's book distinctive and valuable is their special focus on what they refer to as "ecological economic thought." Some readers may surmise that Franco and Missemmer have written a new history of ecological economics, the transdisciplinary heterodox school of thought that emerged as a formal institution in the late 1980s, with its origins extending back to Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen's *The Entropy Law and Economic Processes* (1971). However, Franco and Missemmer wrote no such book. Instead, they characterize "ecological economic thought" broadly and motivate their project by stating the following: "Although [ecological economic thought] might at first be perceived as a broad intellectual history of ecological economics as we know it today, it would be misleading to argue that it can be limited to this definition. If we are convinced that ideas, theories, and concepts have a historicity, then the characteristics of contemporary ecological economics cannot be directly projected onto the past. Doing so would lead to anachronisms. Writing the history of ecological economic thought cannot, therefore, be a naïve search for the origins of today's ecological economics" (p. 4). Franco and Missemmer embark on a heterodox project that suggests that ecological economic thought reaches back to at least the sixteenth century. This wide-ranging brand of ecological economic thought has three key defining characteristics: *embeddedness*, *interdisciplinarity*, and *pluralism*. "Embeddedness" refers to the idea that the human economy does not operate in a vacuum but is embedded in a human society located in ecological space. Ecological economic thinkers also endorse "interdisciplinarity," which is motivated by recognizing the various relationships between human economic processes and the natural world. This, according to Franco and Missemmer, generates a need to go beyond the traditional disciplinary boundaries of economics. Lastly, Franco and Missemmer claim that ecological economic thinkers almost always endorse "pluralism," which I take to be methodological pluralism. Given these key characteristics, Franco and Missemmer describe their project as exploring the history of ecological economic thought, which is the search "for ideas of economic importance which are characterized by common ontological and epistemological conceptions of the functioning of human societies and the

natural world” (p. 6). Aside from suggesting this loose characterization of ecological economic thought, the book does not argue for a specific thesis. Instead, the book consists of ten fascinating and detailed chapters on the same theme, which spans several centuries, beginning with the Renaissance and ending in the mid-twentieth century. Franco and Missemmer provide a sweeping historical analysis that covers a wide range of ecological economic thinkers, including Carl Linnaeus, François Quesnay (and other Physiocrats), Johann von Goethe and Alexander von Humboldt, Antoine Levoisier, Nikolay Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky, John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, Ellen H. Richards, and Aldo Leopold. The topics are equally diverse and equally intriguing. They include ecological utopianism, early Soviet ecology, land economics and the land ethic, Austrian economics, conservation and economic ornithology, and German *Naturphilosophie*. As for the regular gang—Thomas Robert Malthus, David Ricardo, John S. Mill and Karl Marx—these classical political economists are nowhere to be found in the book. Franco and Missemmer explicitly leave these eminent economic theorists for a future project.

One question that arose for me while reading this book is the distinctiveness of ecological economic thought as Franco and Missemmer characterize it. They argue that embeddedness, interdisciplinarity, and pluralism are defining features of ecological economic thought. However, it remains uncertain whether this is the case. After all, interdisciplinarity is the *modus operandi* of many contemporary branches of economics, including neuroeconomics, behavioral economics, and evolutionary economics. Moreover, it remains unclear how ecological economic thinkers are distinctively pluralistic about methodology. Most economists are, to some extent, methodological pluralists. While it is true that ecological economic thinkers would almost certainly affirm that “embeddedness” is a defining feature of their transdisciplinary field, anyone acquainted with science, including non-ecological economic thinkers, would agree. Perhaps the relevant question is not whether embeddedness is a distinct and defining characteristic of ecological economic thought but whether the premise generates interesting hypotheses. Does it help economists and their life scientist collaborators to establish ecological economic models that yield better prescriptions for managing scarce resources? While I am still left wondering about the distinction between ecological economic thought and non-ecological economic thought, I highly recommend this book. For anyone interested in the history of ecological economic thought (broadly construed), the book is essential reading. The standalone nature of each chapter would make it easy for instructors to assign the whole book, or parts of it, for a graduate seminar with a specific focus on the history of environmental or ecological thought.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares no competing interests exist.

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