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BOOK REVIEWS

Consumption Economics: A Multidisciplinary Approach, Marguerite C. Burk. New York: John Wiley, 1968. Pp. xvii, 359. \$10.45.

A Primer on the Economics of Consumption, Elizabeth W. Gilboy. New York: Random House, 1968. Pp. xii, 112. \$2.25.

Two sub-species of *Homo æconomicus*, “the producer” and “the consumer”, have inhabited the pages of economic literature, but the former has attracted by far the greater attention. This has not been because anyone has imagined producers to be more populous, or more important, but because economists have found them simpler to understand, and hence to write about. For, while the activities of the producer could, at least in principle, be described by a series of technical coefficients and prices, genuine insight into the complexities of consumer behaviour—“utility” analysis notwithstanding—has been contingent on the development of the yet infant sciences of sociology and psychology, in which fields most economists feel uneasy. Thus the consumer has been treated with an undue measure of awe and reverence. It has seemed almost improper to inquire into the determinants of his behaviour; for he is Sovereign, his wish is law, and that is the end of it.

The need for a multidisciplinary approach to consumption behaviour has been recognized and paid lip service for some time, but few writers have attempted to meet it. Marguerite C. Burk’s book is an ambitious attempt to build a meaningful model of consumption activity by assembling concepts drawn from economics, sociology, and psychology. Considering the inherent difficulty of such a task, the book must be commended. It is the most comprehensive exposition on consumer behaviour yet available. Nonetheless, while it purports to discuss consumption in general, much of the empirical work cited and most of the illustrative material relate to food consumption.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I is a general introduction to the study of consumption and of its role in a market economy. An interesting distinction is drawn between the role of the consumer in developed and less-developed economies.

In Part II, the author attempts to draw together concepts from the neighbouring social sciences into an integrated behavioural model. The exposition is unavoidably encyclopaedic and at times disjointed, but to build a model at all, albeit unwieldily, from such diverse material is a truly commendable feat. Also unavoidable, given the difficulty of the subject matter of this section, is its air of remoteness and donnishness. This could have been lessened by exercising greater discrimination in the choice of conceptual tools and by description of actual empirical studies illustrating the concepts being discussed. Discussion of survey research

techniques is for some reason relegated to an appendix. This material is excellent, and if incorporated into the theoretical discussion would have drawn attention to the necessity for a behavioural model to be operationally manageable as well as theoretically sound. Part II is on the whole less well documented than the rest of the book; this is a pity given its otherwise high standard of scholarship.

Part III examines consumption at the macroeconomic level, relating this to food marketing problems and problems of the agricultural industry as a whole. This section is better documented, better illustrated with factual examples, and more balanced in the emphasis it gives to theoretical and technical research requirements.

An extensive bibliography containing over four hundred items is supplied at the end of the book, but these are simply listed alphabetically with no classification according to subject matter. The needs of bibliography-users may have been better met by a list of reference sources at the end of each chapter, even if this meant that some items had to be mentioned two or three times. The book is splendidly indexed. Students of agricultural marketing should find it challenging and stimulating.

In *A Primer on the Economics of Consumption*, Elizabeth Gilboy attempts to interpret the main elements of theoretical and empirical consumption economics ". . . in a form accessible not only to a student of economics but to an interested general public as well". Unfortunately the book is hardly suitable for either audience. It attempts to cover a very wide field in ninety-five small pages. For readers not familiar with at least the contents of one of the elementary economic texts, this scanty and lopsided picture of the economy would probably be confusing. For those who are, the book has little extra to offer (with the possible exception of the final chapter, "Consumption and Economic Growth"): they would do better to attempt a more advanced book such as Burk's, or perhaps Cochrane and Bell's.¹ For a book that has little original material it is poorly documented. The author has an annoying habit of referring to original authors by surname without footnote or bibliographic citation of the particular work from which the ideas were drawn. Except for light browsing, the book cannot be recommended.

P. G. WARR

Department of Agriculture, Sydney

Northern California's Water Industry, Joe S. Bain, Richard E. Caves and Julius Margolis. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press for Resources for the Future, Inc., 1966. Pp. xvii, 766. \$U.S. 15.00.

This book is an outstanding addition to the rapidly expanding body of literature in the field of water resource economics. The basic premise on which the study is based is that the entities which develop and control

¹W. W. Cochrane and C. S. Bell, *Economics of Consumption*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1956).

the use of water resources within a region constitute a water industry; "and this water industry is a meaningful unit for significant economic analysis". The authors employ the industry-study approach, a novel method of analysis in water resources research, for an exhaustive study of the water industry of Northern California.

The established tools of industry analysis are modified and adapted to fit the water industry, which differs from conventional industries. Notable is the introduction of the concept of "users' co-operatives" as the predominant entity in the water industry to explain structure, conduct, and performance in the industry. Users' co-operatives are created by specific groups of users for the purpose of developing and supplying water to the group for their collective economic advantage. The users' co-operatives compete with each other for water supplies not on a continuous short-term basis, but rather at sporadic intervals for long-term rights.

Northern California's Water Industry consists of twenty chapters and four appendices and is divided into four parts: Structure, Conduct, Performance, and Summary and Policy Proposals. The book is a comprehensive work covering the whole range of subtopics of water resource economics: water pricing and allocation, water law and regulation, water demand, supply, project evaluation and investment, and so on.

There is, however, a certain amount of repetition of discussion of some topics. This arises because of the manner in which the material is arranged and the apparent desire to have each chapter, or part, as complete in itself. Also, certain sections of the book are difficult as one is confused as to what hypothesis is being examined.

In many instances, the water industry of Northern California merely serves as a medium for discussion of the subject matter. To this extent the title is somewhat restrictive and the subtitle, *The Comparative Efficiency of a Public Enterprise in Developing a Scarce Natural Resource*, reflects more appropriately the authors' aims.

To those interested in this field of research careful study of this book will result in substantial benefits.

D. R. GALLAGHER

Department of Agriculture, Sydney