



Non-Natural Social Science: Reflecting on the Enterprise of “More Heat than Light” (History of Political Economy Annual Supplement)

Neil De Marchi

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Published in 1989, Philip Mirowski's *More Heat Than Light: Economics as Social Physics, Physic's as Nature's Economics* offered a challenge to historians of economics that could not be ignored. Neo-classical economics, he said, adopted certain analytical tools of mid-nineteenth-century physics, simply substituting “utility” for “energy,” and in so doing, chose a natural-world model which denied that economic knowledge might be essentially social and cultural. The essays in this collection represent the first collective effort to respond to Mirowski's challenge by examining and assessing the Mirowski enterprise.

In addition to questioning the veracity of the connection between physics and economics, the contributors consider the far-reaching implications of Mirowski's thesis for the history of economics. Mirowski shows that economic texts must be viewed in their relation to texts outside the field of economics and offers an alternative reading of economic texts as social and cultural inscriptions. As historians of economics respond to Mirowski's challenge, the style and direction of their work will be changed. Ultimately, a careful assessment of *More Heat Than Light* may introduce historians of economics to recognize that the “discipline” of economics may not be the most appropriate category from which to proceed.

Contributors. Jack Birner, Marcel Boumans, A. W. Coats, Avi J. Cohen, I. Bernard Cohen, Neil de Marchi, Steve Fuller, Clifford G. Gaddy, Wade Hands, Albert Jolink, Arjo Klamer, Robert Leonard, Philip Mirowski, Theodore M. Porter, Margaret Schabas, E. Roy Weintraub

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