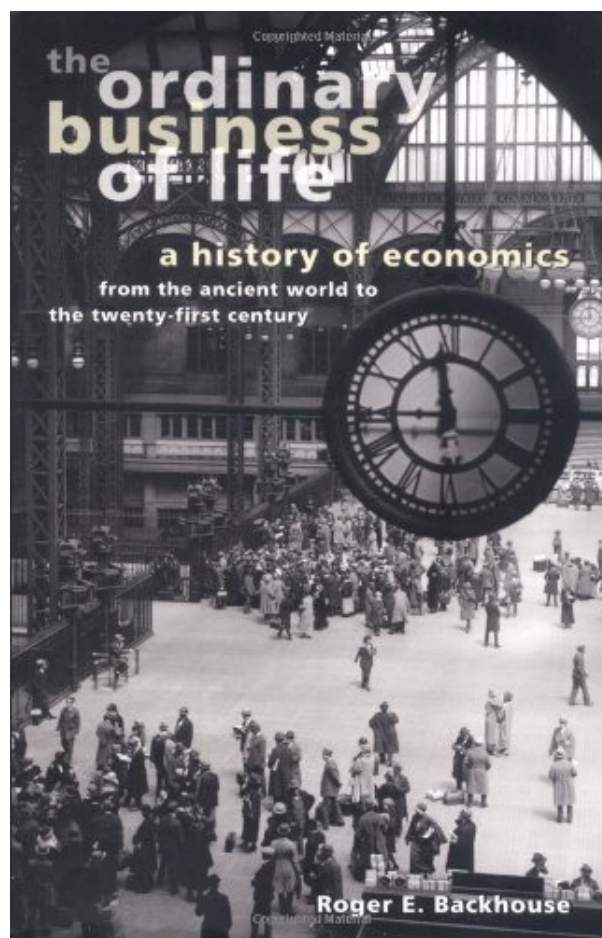
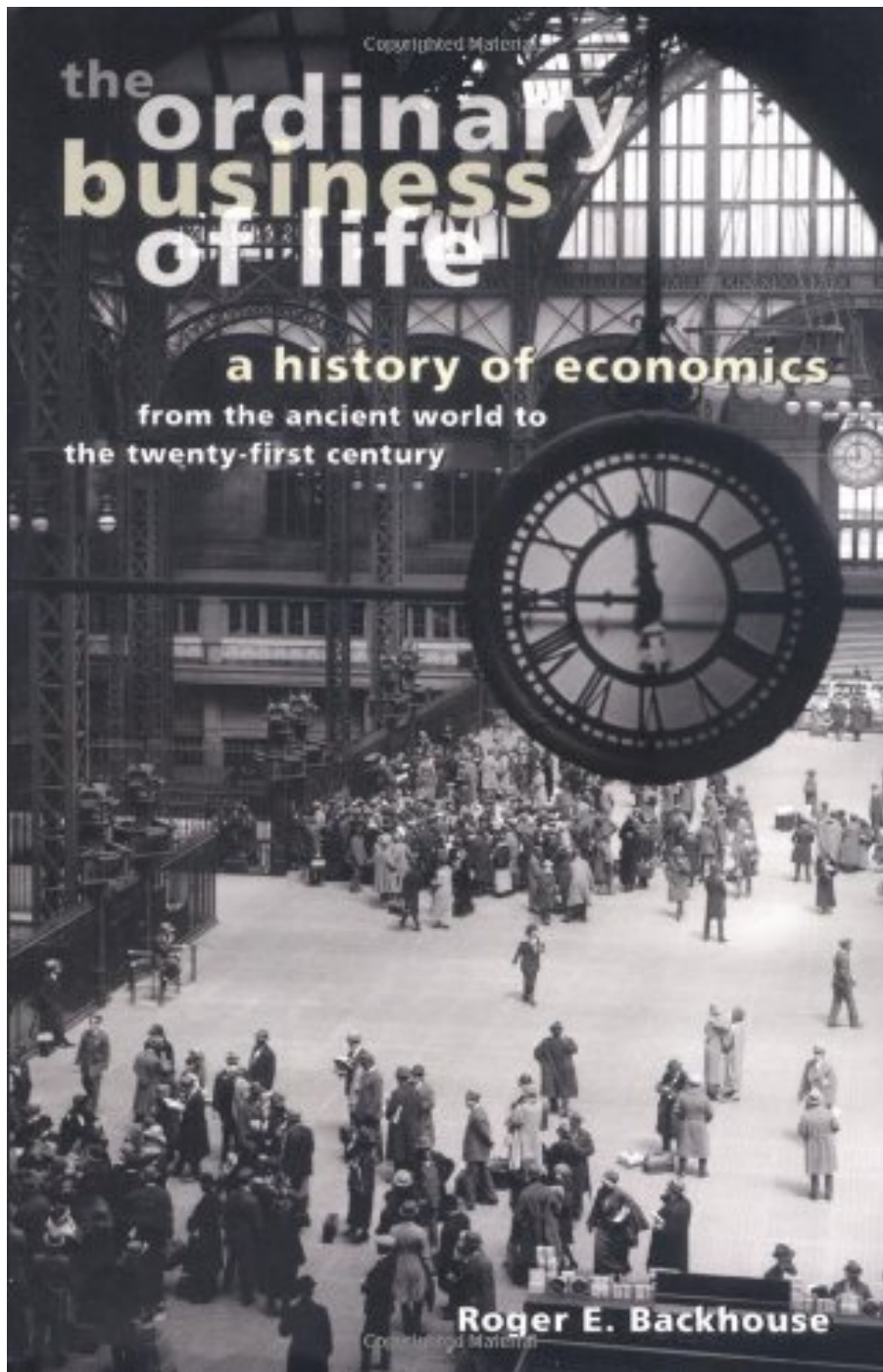


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In his tenth book, Backhouse (economics, Univ. of Birmingham), the editor of the *Journal of Economic Methodology*, explains how world economics reached its present state. Throughout, he places key figures in an appropriate historical context and then explains the various economic ideas as they emerged, using clear analysis and apt quotations. Starting with Homer, Aristotle, and Alexander, he builds connections to the Roman Empire, Old Testament traditions, and the conflict between Christianity and Islam, then moves on to the Renaissance, the Reformation, and all the way up through Adam Smith and Milton Friedman. The result is a well-integrated, thoughtful, accessible text that makes a major contribution to the history and philosophy of economics. What sets this work apart from others on the subject (e.g., Lionel Robbin's *A History of Economic Thought*, Robert Heilbroner's *The Worldly Philosophers*) is the broad time frame and the focus on people and events that shaped the development of economic thought not just the major economists. Important reading for students, professionals, and anyone interested in learning how economics has evolved, this is recommended for all academic and public libraries. Norm Hutcherson, California State Univ. Lib., Bakersfield

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Vividly written and unprecedented in its integration of ancient and modern economic history, this book is the best history of economics--and among the finest intellectual histories--to be published since Heilbroner's *The Worldly Philosophers*. It proves that economics has been anything but "the dismal science."

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Poorly written

By Marc and Susan Osborne

Backhouse tries to give a brief, accessible summary of the history of economics, but the book is so dry that it is almost unreadable. Although Backhouse brings in some social and political background, for the most part he's just listing people and theories. His explanations, designed for non-technical readers, are not mathematically complex, and do avoid unnecessary terminology. But they're written in a choppy, condensed style, without illumination from real-world examples. The result is just not compelling reading. And his decision to take his history back to Greek times doesn't really work: the pre-modern thinkers omitted from most standard histories aren't consciously writing about economics. Rather, Backhouse is inferring economic assumptions from literary or ethical discussions. This discussion is potentially interesting (although it suffers from the same flaws as the rest of the book), but not really the same subject-matter as the conventional history of economics.



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