

ESSAYS IN BRITISH ACCOUNTING RESEARCH

**Edited by
Michael Bromwich and
Anthony G Hopwood**

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and **Anthony Hopwood**

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Preface

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The publication of this volume of provocative and wide-ranging essays testifies to the progress made by British academic accountancy in the last decade. Prior to the 1970s, the number of full-time accounting academics in tertiary institutions was quite small, and the number who were actively engaged in research still smaller. Early attempts to raise the standard of British academic accounting had not been marked by conspicuous success. The Accounting Research Association, founded so optimistically in the 1930s by Cosmo Gordon and Ronald Edwards (as he was then known), failed to survive the war. The active programme of research developed by the Incorporated Accountants' Research Committee, the courageous journal known as *Accounting Research*, and the other enterprises set in motion by Bertram Nelson, Sewell Bray, and Leo T. Little did not survive the integration of the Society of Incorporated Accountants and the Institutes of Chartered Accountants in 1957. The Parker Report of 1961 discouraged efforts at bringing universities and the profession into collaboration (but see Bertram Nelson's refreshing dissent in an appendix to the Report).

But attitudes soon began to change. In the 1960s, tertiary institutions in Britain began to establish courses in business studies. Business schools were opened in London and Manchester. By the beginning of the 1970s, there was in Britain—as elsewhere in the world—a rising demand by students for courses in accountancy, and, one by one, British universities established Chairs in accounting and kindred subjects, frequently in departments of economics. (The views of some economists toward university study in accountancy have been slow to change, and not a few British accounting academics who were attached to economics departments apparently experienced a tension with economists not unlike that which prompted Hatfield to write his famous 'An Historical Defense of Bookkeeping' in 1923.) Although the teaching loads were, and continue to be, heavy, many of the mostly young academics embarked on ambitious programmes of research. Two journals were launched in 1969–70: the *Journal of Business Finance*, which was reconstituted in 1974 under the title, *Journal of Business Finance and Accounting*; and *Accounting and Business Research*, published by the same body that had scuttled *Account-*

ing Research in another era. In 1976, *Accounting, Organizations and Society* joined the march.

At this stage in the evolution of British accounting research, the essays gathered for this volume perform several useful functions. First, they survey much of the salient work and identify the principal themes which have been addressed thus far. Secondly, they raise questions about the directions taken and the quality of what has been done. Thirdly, they propose an agenda for future research. In making these assessments, the contributors to this collection compare and contrast the lines and modes of inquiry in Britain with those observable in North America. But the differences between recent British and North American research may be explained, not by geography, but by culture, institutions, and history.

The role of universities in the formation of accounting academics has been quite different in Britain than in North America. North American accounting academics have, for the most part, been educated in business schools, and, until the last ten or fifteen years, they tended not to have been extensively exposed to the disciplines of economics, psychology, and mathematics (including statistics). The contents of *The Accounting Review* prior to the late 1960s bear out this generalisation. By the early 1970s, however, most new assistant professors in North America were much better schooled in research methods borrowed from other disciplines than were their predecessors. The tradition in Britain has been quite different. While some of today's accounting academics have 'graduated' from the ranks of qualified accountants, others have done studies in economics or accounting departments. Some have done both. Moreover, the placement of accounting academics in economics departments has influenced the questions addressed and the methods employed in their research. Training in research methodology has not been as intensive or widespread in Britain as it has in the United States.

The longer economics tradition associated with British accounting academics does much to explain the active interest, over many years, of British researchers in opportunity cost theory and income theory. The long line of British enquiries into these questions is well brought out in the essays by Arnold and Scapens, and Whittington. In particular, the 'value to the owner' school has been championed, almost without exception, by Britons and Australians, although the germ of the idea is often traced to Bonbright, an American public utilities economist. The writings emanating from this school had an obvious impact on the Report of the Sandilands Committee, and, through that report, also upon certain utterances of the Financial Accounting Standards Board in the U.S.A.

Another distinctive feature of the British accounting literature has been the numerous articles devoted to 'cash flow accounting'. Lee and Lawson have been the two prime movers, and it is fitting that they both be represented in this volume. In his paper, Lee reviews the arguments in favour of 'cash flow accounting'. Like many essays in this volume, Lee's is

a helpful annotation on the pertinent literature, citing British as well as American writings on the subject. Lawson, in an empirical study, suggests some of the consequences of the disparity between measured profit performance and measured 'cash flow' performance.

The essays by Tomkins and Perrin seem, to me, to suggest agendas for academic research rather than an impressive record of achievement. Some work, to be sure, has been done, but, as in North America, the non-business sectors have attracted considerably less interest among academics. A trend toward serious research in public sector accounting has, however, become noticeable in North America in the last half-dozen years (spurred, one suspects, by the financial predicament of New York City), but it is difficult to say whether the incentives for such research in North America and Britain will succeed in shifting resources further in that direction. Both papers in this volume propose a wide range of issues worthy of research.

Parker's essay represents a more thorough treatment (with particular attention to possible British work) of a theme which was developed in the report of the Committee on Accounting History of the American Accounting Association, in 1970. I was the chairman of that committee. It was created by AAA President, Sidney Davidson, following my suggestion that the Association do what it could to encourage more and better work in accounting history, which had been a neglected field in North America. He responded by asking me to chair a committee to recommend an AAA role, and the committee's report was the result. Unfortunately, the Association did not accept the challenge, but I hope that Parker will be more successful. Few incentives are present in North America to encourage younger academics, especially, to conduct research in accounting history. In Britain, one can perhaps be more optimistic.

In North America, as in Britain, it is difficult to assess the increment to knowledge produced thus far by the outpouring of modern empirical research in accounting. New insights into the uses which are made of accounting information have been provided, but one could question whether the substantial investment of research resources since the late 1960s has yielded corresponding benefits in the form of new knowledge. One can, therefore, understand Peasnell's pessimistic appraisal of British empirical research. In the social sciences, we perhaps expect too much of our empirical research, particularly when comparisons are drawn with results in the physical sciences. But we work with variables that are less susceptible to rigorous empirical study, and even carefully guarded generalisations may be difficult to draw. Nonetheless, in order to be able to make defensible accounting choices we will require much better knowledge about the interactions between accounting information and individuals, organisations, markets, and society. I, therefore, join Peasnell in hoping that the necessary resources will be devoted to raising British empirical research to an even higher plane of quality and usefulness.

Cooper, in his wide-ranging analysis, examines the contributions which contingency theory can make to the design of accounting systems and to

the greater usefulness of management accounting. Bhaskar, in an extensive review of work which has applied quantitative methods to a variety of problems in management accounting (a difficult literature, indeed), helps interpret, both for the researcher and practitioner, many of the noteworthy developments—as well as prospects for future lines of enquiry. Lowe draws on his earlier work to argue for an ‘extroversion’ and a coming of age of the literature on MIS design.

In his paper, Bromwich outlines the contributions of economics and social choice theory to the increasingly complex process of setting accounting standards. In Britain and North America, standard-setting was virtually ignored as a topic of research until the late 1960s, and the research since then on both sides of the Atlantic has confronted accounting policy-makers—much to their discomfort, I should imagine—with arguments and evidence that their decisions carry economic, social, and political consequences. It is a fascinating and almost boundless subject, and one of the largest questions of the 1980s centres on the role which these alleged consequences will play in accounting policy-making—and what will become of the standard-setting process if they do play a role.

The perceived schism between the work of researchers and the interests of practitioners and policy-makers is raised by Flint and Shaw (and also by Peasnell). To some extent, this widening schism is one of the costs unavoidably incurred when, within a single generation, the states of accounting research and of preparation for the accounting profession both undergo radical change. Research has suddenly become more rigorous and scientific, which, during the period of transition, will make it less intelligible to non-researchers. No-one can deny that there has been a revolution in accounting research methods in the last ten to fifteen years. But, during the same period, there has also been a revolution in the manner of entry to the British accounting profession. What was, not so many years ago, a profession which included very few university graduates—indeed, university attendance was positively discouraged in many quarters—may soon be confining its intake to university graduates (but not necessarily those specialising in accounting). If, for those students who do university studies in accounting, British academics—unlike North Americans—instil in their students a respect for rigorous research and an appreciation for the results which sound research can produce, it is reasonable to expect a better understanding between professionals and academics. The publication of this collection of essays should further this understanding, as almost all of its contents can be read and comprehended by professionals as well as academics.

The keen interest of the Social Science Research Council in the cause of accounting research has, indeed, been welcome, and I am pleased and honoured to have been invited by the editors to collaborate, if only in a small way, in this useful undertaking. I hope that it will lead to more and better research and to closer and more fruitful links between researchers and the professional accounting bodies.

Introduction

The last decade has witnessed a growing interest in the United Kingdom in accounting research. With a rapid expansion in university teaching of accounting and finance, there has been a major inflow of new people into the academic community. Although, initially, a great deal of the available effort was devoted to teaching and to the administration of newly established departments, more serious attention now is being given to research and scholarly inquiry. Perhaps for the first time there is a fair sized, viable and active accounting research community in the U.K. Of equal importance, there are signs that accounting practitioners have started to recognize the contribution which new knowledge can make to the development of accounting practice. For, as in many other countries, questions of accounting policy have entered the arena of public debate. With pressures for greater organizational accountability and disclosure, further standardization of the accounting craft, a growing awareness of the roles which accounting and financial management can play in improving organizational efficiency and effectiveness and, not least in importance, a more informed and critical media, aspects of accounting have come to be examined, debated and challenged in new ways. Accounting has come to be recognized as a socially important, but not unproblematic, area of management activity, and one in which there is a need for new insights and developments.

The debates over inflation accounting forcefully illustrated these tendencies. Emerging out of both an inflationary economy and the establishment of institutions for the regulation and standardization of accounting, the discussions quickly illustrated both the problematic nature of accounting in practice, and the ways in which debate in the area is dependent upon the existence of bodies of thought which can provide a basis for understanding and evaluating practical options and alternatives. Possibly for the first time, accounting research was demonstrably shown to be relevant to the development of accounting practice. Practitioners, let alone academics, publicly argued over the merits of alternative theoretical perspectives and their practical consequences. Moreover, the inflation accounting debate also illustrated the reality of the broader economic, social and organizational significance of the accounting function. From an early stage

inflation accounting alternatives were discussed in the context of policy questions related to the management of the national economy, industrial and corporate strategy, and the communication and use of corporate information in a more pluralistic society where the interests of the capital markets are considered alongside those of the state, professional institutions and managerial responses to the organized labour movement.

Although obviously a central debate of the last decade, the discussion of inflation accounting is only one of a number of issues which have contributed to a growing recognition of the wider significance of accounting and the need for new insights and understandings. Mention also might be made of issues such as the appropriate institutional locus and processes of accounting standard setting, the growing concern with the disclosure of information to employees and trade unions, and the roles which accounting might play in furthering the efficiency and accountability of public institutions.

A New Research Initiative

Aware of the importance of such issues and the need for further research, the Management and Industrial Relations Committee of the U.K. Social Science Research Council launched an Accounting Research Initiative in 1976. Building on the recommendations of the Tricker (1975) report entitled 'Research in Accountancy—A Strategy for Further Work', the initiative sought to provide both general and specific stimuli to accounting research with funds being made available for particular areas of research, the establishment of research networks and the discussion of research in progress.

The specific areas identified for immediate research funding were inflation accounting and information disclosure to employees and trade unions. In the area of inflation accounting, funds have been made available for two studies of the impact of inflation on management accounting and organizational decision-making, an aspect of the problem relatively neglected to date by researchers world wide. A two-year professorial fellowship also has been established with the aim of providing an overview of both the current state of knowledge in the area and the nature of the debates that have taken place in the U.K. Aware of the paucity of research on the currently contentious issue of disclosing information, both financial and otherwise, to employees and trade unions, the SSRC initially supported four research projects on this topic and has subsequently allocated funds to a fifth. The fact that these projects adopted very different perspectives and used an array of methodologies was seen as an advantage at this stage in the development of knowledge.

In the case of two further areas of accounting research the SSRC aimed to provide relatively modest funds which might help to establish a viable

network of potential researchers and stimulate the identification of topics worthy of subsequent research funding. With such objectives in mind, seminar groups on Management Accounting and on the Social and Political Aspects of Accounting were established under the chairmanship of Michael Bromwich and Professor Bengt Stymne (of the Stockholm School of Economics), respectively. It is a sign of practitioner interest that the former group is co-funded by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales and the Institute of Cost and Management Accountants. Both have so far succeeded in pulling together interested groups of researchers, and others, and show the potential to provide a necessary stimulus for encouraging future research in their respective areas of concern.

The SSRC also organized a series of national accounting research conferences as part of its initiative—a particularly important factor in a country which has not had a rich and sustained tradition of scholarly discussion in the accounting area. The first such conference, held at the Oxford Centre for Management Studies in January 1977, played a key role in launching the initiative, bringing it to the attention of the relatively newly appointed accounting professoriate and an active group of younger scholars. A subsequent gathering in 1978 provided a worthwhile opportunity for discussing the organizational as well as the intellectual constraints on research, and it resulted in a number of ideas which subsequently were incorporated into SSRC discussions and decisions. Finally, in December 1979, a major conference was organized at the London Graduate School of Business Studies to review the current state of accounting research in the U.K. Based, because of costs, on a series of invited papers from only a segment of the academic population, this latter conference, nevertheless, aimed to provide insights into both earlier research traditions and emerging issues and concerns. These papers form the basis of the present volume.

Past Traditions and Current Issues

A number of the essays which follow focus on the understandings that have begun to merge from important areas of past as well as current research. The discussions of income theory, costing theory and cash flow accounting are particularly important in this respect. Drawing on substantive traditions of inquiry in the U.K. they provide insights into the nature of the problems that have been investigated, the theoretical perspectives that have been drawn on and both the conclusions and the remaining uncertainties.

Other essays reflect more recent research interests. Professional concerns with accounting regulation, for instance, are resulting in a growth of interest in both the institutional processes of accounting standard-setting and its more fundamental conceptual characteristics. Similarly, the shifting

structure of the economy and changing patterns of political belief are stimulating interest in accounting problems in the public sector, at both the national and local levels. It also is possible that the uncertainties of the accounting present have encouraged an increasing number of accounting researchers to investigate the processes through which accounting has come to be as it now is.

The initial inspiration for some current research no doubt came from across the Atlantic. Be that as it may, some of the subsequent essays illustrate how the very different institutional bases and traditions of inquiry already are influencing the type of research that is being undertaken in areas such as the empirical study of accounting, the application of quantitative methods and the investigation of the behavioural and organizational aspects of both accounting and information systems. The sophisticated methodologies that are so characteristic of American empirical inquiries can, we think, be contrasted with the more descriptive approaches in the U.K. and in the behavioural and organizational areas the contrasts are becoming even more evident. For whilst inquiries in the U.S.A. still emphasize a psychological perspective, British work increasingly is reflecting more organizational and societal levels of analysis.

Unfortunately, the conference was not able to provide a comprehensive overview of either current or emerging accounting research in the U.K. No papers focused on auditing research or more traditional management accounting research concerns, for instance, despite the fact that the latter has been the subject of a number of inquiries and the former is now starting to attract more interest. Of particular significance, however, is the absence of papers on the issues raised by the growing practical concern with the disclosure of information to employees and trade unions, and its use by these groups.

Increasingly, the accounting function in the U.K. is being viewed in a more pluralistic context, as was evidenced by the form and recommendations of The Corporate Report published by the then Accounting Standards Steering Committee in 1975. Managerial groups, for instance, are having to grapple with the difficulties of communicating financial information and any implied economic messages to an employee and trade union audience. Equally, however, trade unionists and some of their supporters in the academic community are starting to investigate the problems with using accounting information in the context of both collective bargaining and the formulation of wider industrial policies by the organized labour movement. Consideration is being given to the consequences of broader legislative disclosure requirements, the roles which accounting has played in industrial policy making and the possibilities for formulating accounting policies which can more adequately reflect the concerns and needs of a broader array of social interests. Perhaps not unsurprisingly, the emerging patterns of research are starting to relate more explicitly to the research traditions of continental Europe and Scandinavia rather than to those

which have emerged in a very different social, institutional and political context in the U.S.A.

Despite a number of such gaps, we nevertheless hope that the essays collected in this volume provide a useful summary of some of the important areas of past and current accounting research in the U.K. It is certainly our hope that they might help to bring to the attention of a wider audience in the U.K. and elsewhere both the substantive progress that has been achieved and some of the problems that are currently being investigated by the growing number of members of the British accounting research community.

Some Future Directions

Now that a viable research community is in the process of being established in the U.K., what are the issues and problems that might concern it in the years ahead? Of course, making such predictions is a hazardous task at the best of times, and particularly so in an area which has newly emerged and which itself is concerned with the creation of new insights and possibilities. We nevertheless think that some of the concerns and approaches of today are pointing towards a number of possibilities for tomorrow. So, with due caution, to these we now turn.

Already mention has been made of the growing recognition of the pluralistic nature of the accounting context. Whilst much early research and theorizing was orientated towards the accounting needs of the capital market and of a management group who were presumed to be striving to meet its performance demands, current research already is adopting a wider perspective. For instance, attention is being given to the consequences for accounting standard-setting of conflicting information needs, to the roles which accounting and auditing might play in furthering corporate accountability and to the ways in which the wider disclosure of information might provide a broader basis for the consideration of industrial development policies. Moreover, the growing interest in accounting in the public sector also points to a similar expansion of research orientations. For there too, research is now starting to consider the roles which accounting might be able to play in furthering not only traditional conceptions of economic efficiency but also more widely conceived notions of both effectiveness and accountability.

It is likely that such a changing view of both the context in which accounting operates and the roles which it does and might serve will continue to influence what issues are seen as problematic, and thereby the loci of research. Already in the area of financial accounting standard-setting, for instance, problems are starting to be seen in terms of both their technical characteristics and the ways in which they have emerged at the interface between the bodies concerned with accounting regulation, the

institutions of the accounting profession and agencies representing not only industrial and commercial interests but also those of the State. Whilst technical considerations will remain of considerable importance, there already are indications that such interests will be complemented by attempts to understand the institutional and political processes that are implicit in standard setting, the roles played by a whole array of economic and social interests and issues, and not least in importance, the complex ways in which knowledge of accounting comes to bear on its practice. For example, rather than focusing on the presumed needs and decision models of very particular groups of users of accounting information, which was a predominant concern of the past, current research is striving to ascertain just who are the users and how the information is used, the roles which it plays and is seen to play, and the consequences which it has.

It is our belief that such shifting research perspectives are of the utmost importance. By striving to provide understandings of the processes of accounting change and the ways in which accounting is implicated in economic and social action they have the potential to provide bases for debating the accountings that might be in ways that are not divorced from the complexities of the accounting present.

Interestingly, not dissimilar perspectives are emerging in the study of management accounting and information systems. Again, there are signs that past emphases on the creation of the technically new are beginning to be complemented by a concern with understanding how management accounting systems have come to be, the roles which they serve and the consequences which they have for organizational functioning and performance. Rather than continuing to articulate ever more normative possibilities, so many of which have differed radically from what appears to be done, a few researchers are starting to ascertain just what is the current state of practice, the factors underlying its development and the problems which it is facing. Foresaking the desk for the factory and the office, such researchers are starting to draw on a wider array of insights from disciplines such as organization theory and sociology in order to understand the ways in which accounting is implicated in organized endeavour.

Research which so strives to understand the complexities of accounting in action undoubtedly will present both opportunities and frustrations to the scholars of the future. It certainly will not be easy to develop perspectives which will help us to appreciate either the accounting context or the pressures for development and change. Nor should we minimize the problems of introducing and gaining acceptance for those methodologies which might more adequately illuminate the accounting condition. On the other hand, difficult as such problems may be, they at least offer some possibility for moving towards the integration of accounting research into the mainstream of social science enquiry. Of equal importance, the emerging research interests also have the potential to contribute more directly to the practice of accounting. For by trying to understand both

accounting as it is and as it might become, there is a real chance that we will be able to create a greater interplay between the practice of, and research into, accounting—a factor which we consider to be of the greatest significance.

Acknowledgements

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the help and support provided by a number of individuals and organizations.

The role of the Social Science Research Council has been a particularly important one. Both by its funding of the conference on which the present volume is based and its more general concern for furthering accounting research in the U.K., the SSRC has provided such a vital stimulus in the last few years. In this respect we would particularly like to mention the efforts of Bob Tricker, whose report on the state of accounting research in the U.K. provided an essential basis for action, Professor Dorothy Wedderburn who was Chairman of the Management and Industrial Relations Committee of the SSRC for much of the time when the accounting research initiative was being considered and planned, and Professor Chris Higgins who has been a supportive and facilitative Chairman of the SSRC's Accounting Steering Committee. Our appreciation is also extended to the many members of the SSRC secretariat who have played such a vital role throughout the initiative, particularly to Michael Brennen, Chris Caswill, Gerda Loosemore-Reppen and Paul Long.

On such occasions it is unusual to mention one's publisher. However, we would like to acknowledge the help provided by Alfred Waller and Eric Dalton of Pitmans. They have proved to be enthusiastic supporters of the whole project and a source of a great deal of help and advice.

Last, but by no means least, we would like to thank our secretaries, Melinda Smallwood and Meg Wells for their help in not only organizing the conference but also dealing so efficiently with the seemingly endless correspondence generated by the subsequent editorial process.

Anthony Hopwood
Michael Bromwich

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1 The British contribution to income theory

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1 Scope and Plan of the Paper

The theory and measurement of income has attracted a voluminous literature during the 20th century, and it is not proposed to attempt a comprehensive survey of the whole field. In order to make the subject manageable, the following constraints will be imposed:

(a) the main objective will be to survey the current state of the art, rather than to provide a comprehensive historical survey of the literature which led to the present state of knowledge;

(b) the concept and measurement of business income is the central concern of this paper and the financial accounting literature the main source of reference. The concepts of personal income and national income are not considered, although welfare economics provides many useful insights into the fundamental assumptions and objectives of accounting (and is likely to be of even greater relevance in the future: see, for example, the recent survey of the economic literature on real income measurement, Sen (1979)). It should be noted that the measurement of business income also has underpinnings in welfare economics, e.g. it is often assumed, implicitly or explicitly, that accounts should provide information which will enable shareholders or management to make profit (or net present wealth) maximizing investment decisions, and this objective presumably has its origins in the concept of Pareto efficiency which can (under certain important restrictive assumptions) be achieved by competitive, profit-maximizing behaviour. (See, for example, Edwards and Bell (1961), p. 271, footnote 2.) Useful introductory surveys of welfare economics are Winch (1971) and Mishan (1966). A good illustration of how the results of welfare economics can be applied to a problem of business income is Bromwich (1977);

(c) 'theory' is taken to apply to any idea or proposal supported by deductive rather than inductive reasoning, i.e. to *a priori* rather than empirical work;

(d) it is not proposed to attempt a comprehensive treatment of inflation accounting, which is an overlapping, but partially disjointed, field;

(e) although the British contribution to income theory will be emphasized, it is not proposed to confine the discussion to British contributions to the field. To do so would be hopelessly one-sided and insular, and would ignore the essentially international character of the debate.

The plan of the rest of the paper is as follows. In section 2, a brief historical perspective is provided. This is followed in section 3 by a summary of the present state of income theory. Specific problem areas of the subject are then examined. In section 4, two aspects of the relationship between the measurement of income and the purpose for which it is used are considered. In recent years, there has been some exploration of income as a measure of dividend-paying capacity ('distributable profit'), and of income as a basis for taxation, and these are selected as examples of the 'different incomes for different purposes' approach. Section 5 considers two techniques of income measurement which have received much attention recently. In the British literature, the idea of 'value to the owner' has been given particular emphasis as an asset valuation basis, and that of the 'gearing adjustment' has received similar emphasis in the area of capital maintenance. Finally, an attempt is made to draw some conclusions for the directions in which future research might develop.

2 Historical Development and Present State of the Art

Two important and distinct strands can be discerned in the evolution and current state of the theory of income measurement. The first is what might be called the 'pure theory', i.e. the development of an 'ideal' model of income, which relies heavily on the work of economists. The second is the concern with measuring income in practice, and is more closely associated with accountants. The best work of the latter type (such as Edwards and Bell (1961)) relies on the theory for its foundation, and the most immediately useful theory from the accountant's standpoint is that which makes assumptions which might apply in the real world. It is perhaps worth emphasizing that the economist's standpoint is sometimes different, being concerned with the properties of abstract models of the economy in which income measurement may not play a central role and a degree of abstraction may be permissible. It is often overlooked that Hicks's (1946) definition is merely an aside in a work on rather abstract economic theory. However, many fruitful insights have been obtained by a systematic comparison of the accountant's and the economist's approach (e.g. R. S. Edwards (1937), Alexander (1950), and Solomons (1961)).

There is no comprehensive survey of this literature, but the best and by far the most common starting point (especially for British work) is the collection of readings edited by Parker and Harcourt (1969). The Introduction to Parker and Harcourt has also become a classic in its own right, and