Introduction

The explicit aim of this book is to help readers to get a good understanding of the working of what is called the ‘international monetary system’. In fact, it would be perhaps more correct to speak of ‘the international set of monetary systems’ insofar as there is not a single system, so the ‘international monetary system’ can only be the juxtaposition of different monetary systems. This is why an analysis of the international monetary system cannot be carried out without referring more generally to the working of monetary systems. Moreover, one cannot really understand any economic problem without using the general principles of economic theory. Contrary to what is too often believed, there is not a specific analysis of international monetary economics, of industrial economics, of the economy of health, development economics or any other economics: regardless of the specific purpose of an analysis, general economic theory should be applied, because there is necessarily and logically a single approach to economic problems (and even, more generally, to all social phenomena).

This is why a study of monetary systems cannot be made independently of the general economic theory, and the analysis of the international monetary system cannot be done independently of monetary theory (itself, therefore, constituting a particular application of general economic theory). That is also why, beyond specific issues studied in this book, it aims to show how the general economic theory allows one to understand the concerned phenomena. Thus, this book pursues a methodological target, since it has been written with the hope that the approach which is used here can help to develop parallel approaches when studying all kinds of different problems. The analysis proposed in this book is therefore a practical example of a method of reasoning which can be used in any field of knowledge, about any phenomenon.

I do not intend, therefore, to provide the reader with a lot of information concerning, for example, specific facts of history or current events; all of these can be found in documents which are easily accessible. It is useless, indeed, to possess and accumulate information if one does not have a method of analysis to understand the meaning and scope of this information. Moreover, employing an analytical method helps in selecting
the significant facts. This is why I give only a limited amount of factual information in this book, just in cases where it seems able to illustrate an analysis. The reader will also find only a limited number of references to economic literature, since I mainly want to focus on the logical consistency of reasoning, and not give an extensive review of ideas or of the history of ideas. I only hope that mastering the intellectual instruments proposed in this book will not only help readers to better understand the specific facts that are of interest for them, but also provide them with a framework of critical analysis for the readings they may be inclined to undertake later on in the specific field of the present work, or in any other field.

A last statement is undoubtedly necessary. I have stressed above that it is impossible to analyse any phenomenon without referring to the general economic theory. But the objection may be raised that there is actually not one theory, but several, and even that economists are often in deep disagreement over them. This is certainly true. But I have tried hard to make my analysis compatible with the principles of economic theory which can be considered as indisputable, so that my statements are perfectly consistent between them and correctly correspond to the way individuals act in a human society.