

**Eric Jones (2002) *The Record of Global Economic Development* Edward Elgar, 226p.**

In the preface to his new book, *The Record of Global Economic Development*, Eric Jones notes that the “animosity” of the reaction of “noisy anti-European or anti-Western ideologues” to his older work, “The European Miracle”, “took my breath away” (viii). I am afraid he is going to receive the same kind of reaction for his new book. In fact, it is so polemic, imprecise and, at times, self-righteous that it would almost be amusing, if it did not represent the view of those that govern the world, and, therefore, the broadly unquestioned mainstream of economic thinking.

Jones offers the reader four parts containing a rather eclectic collection of essays amongst which the links are not always clear. In the first part, he tackles the question of long-term economic development, mostly reviewing his earlier arguments. The second part addresses the issue of protectionism through two examples: English farming in the context of the European Common Agricultural Policy and the more cultural question of language protection. In the third part, the author looks at the East Asian countries trying to extract general lessons from the experiences of both the period of explosive growth and of the 1997-98 crisis, with a particular focus on the rejection of culture as the explanatory variable. The fourth and final part assembles three very different essays on the competitiveness of Australian business, on the history of supermarkets in Australia and on the author's views on globalisation.

Throughout the book, Jones does raise quite a few interesting questions. For example, his critique of the notion of multifunctionality in agricultural policy in view of often quite unenvironmental behaviour by farmers merits attention, although he does not show the necessary fairness and detailed analysis of European policy to be convincing in his arguments. The fact that he attacks the farmers' environmental record to then plead for the release of the land for industrial development is just one of the incoherencies that makes his logic seem more driven by (neo-liberal) ideology than reasoning.

His rejection of culture as an explanation of economical development is quite convincing and certainly important in the face of 'end of history' arguments. However, he again seems to contradict himself when at several points he hints at an inherent suppressive character of Islam which would make development difficult, if not impossible (thus actually echoing Fukuyama's arguments). More importantly, he implies a certain linearity of cultural development and, therefore, seems to argue that even though cultural aspects are not determining for economic development, this is not because different cultures can develop in their own fashion, but because each culture can evolve in the "correct" direction, i.e. that of Western liberal democracy, and thus foster development.

His plea for a benign neglect of "dying" or "minor" languages is certain to attract criticism from around the world, not only because he wants English to be the lingua franca (something that probably doesn't even need argument anymore), but because he claims that "culture does not depend on language" (90) and that, therefore, no culture would be at risk because of the adoption of English as the global first language to be taught in schools. This chapter highlights how Jones completely subjects all human experience to economical reasoning as he analyses the language question through the sole lens of cost. This reflects his general view that "the universalism of economics offers the best single vantage point" of all the social sciences. Add to that his observation that "[linguists and farmers] live so enclosed in their own professional cultures that they are probably unaware of how they sound to outsiders" (xii) and one understands that some readers might actually show the animosity Jones found so surprising. A little more self-criticism and analysis of his own situated knowledge, as well as the relativisation of the superiority of economical science, seems indicated.

One of the main weaknesses of this book, however, is the imprecision of his arguments and the selectivity in the use of sources. When, for example, he supports his argument for the abolition of dialects in Britain with the fact that "British television has a smaller share of the German market than Australian television since foreigners find many British regional accents hard to understand" (85), he seems completely oblivious

of the fact that German television is dubbed almost without exception, therefore making dialects completely irrelevant. At another point, he claims that “many people have lately been growing up in peaceful and prosperous parts of the world” contradicting the fact that never in history have so many people been subjected to war as today. In reaction to the “graying greenies” he claims that “in many countries the regulations they insisted upon have been incorporated in routine legislation” (199) implying (by asking “What’s next?”) that environmental problems have been solved, and, therefore, ignoring the ever rising urgency of responses to phenomena such as global warming. His arguments about Islam seem to stem from only one source, and he bases his analysis of fraud in the EU on British and Australian media, probably amongst the most europhobic sources available. These might all seem like somewhat insignificant details, but they are representative of the fact that throughout the book the reader can only be surprised by the continuous lack of rigour in the analysis.

This brings up my last point: Jones presents himself as apolitical, relying on “the consensus of sober professional opinion” (13) and never having intended “to imbue my economic history with political significance” (vii). This book suggests the contrary, however. The very selective use of reality in order to fit his arguments; the denigration of his critics as “ideologues” and “unprofessional” without ever actually engaging with their arguments; the qualification of groups opposing what he sees as pure economical reason as “Olsonian distributional coalitions” (79); and most of all, the fact that despite the book's title, his analysis is limited to Europe and Asia and completely ignores colonial history; all these coalesce to a highly situated, and very political statement.

In summary, this book is (for most parts) very disappointing on a scientific level, but is a good example of the dominant ideological currents posing as objective, almost natural truth. It will add to the current tendency within neo-liberal thought of almost missionary engagement with the world and a somewhat self-righteous vision of the West as the global avant-garde.

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