

E. A. Wrigley, *Poverty, progress, and population* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp. xiv + 463. 17 figs. 49 tabs. £55; \$75; pbk. £19.99; \$28)

This latest book by Wrigley contains 15 essays, of which two are new and 13 have been published in different books and journals since 1986. The book is divided into three major sections. The first looks at the nature of long run growth, occupational censuses in the early nineteenth century, and poverty. The second considers town and country, and the third deals with demography. Of the previously unpublished papers, one reflects on the accuracy of family reconstruction and generalized inverse projection methods, while the second, and much the longest in this volume, discusses the census information about occupational structure in the mid-nineteenth century.

As might be expected in a volume of this type, some of the essays are highly specific, and the diversity of Wrigley's interests makes it impossible for a reviewer to do justice to the academic contribution in the limited space available here. Instead I will centre my comments on one or two of the underlying arguments in the book. Wrigley contends that England experienced two kinds of growth between the reigns of Elizabeth and Victoria, namely 'Smithian' growth, based on 'the interrelated benefits associated with growing market size, improved transport, better commercial facilities, increasing working capital and the division of labour' within an organic economy, and the much faster growth associated with the new, mineral-based energy economy. The two types of growth inevitably overlap chronologically, but Wrigley argues that the scope for growth and change was still largely determined by the vigour of agriculture in 1800, and that the rate of growth in production per head was 'unlikely' to have changed significantly between the early seventeenth century and the mid-nineteenth. Therefore, even though the rapid demographic growth of the long eighteenth century can be linked to growing material prosperity (producing earlier marriages and a decline in stillbirths and maternal mortality), there were limits to sustained growth in a predominantly organic economy, as suggested in the writings of Smith or Malthus, and illustrated by the Netherlands during this century. Fast growth could only be achieved when the contribution from the mineral-based energy economy became significant, which in turn provided the opportunity for other countries to close the distance with England.

If the Wrigley thesis provides a coherent explanation for the slow, but positive growth of the English economy over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the reasons quite why its demographic and urban structures (to mention just two variables), differed from those of most of its European neighbours are only hinted at. On a number of occasions (I counted five), Wrigley stresses the presence of peasant agriculture on mainland Europe as a barrier to development, either because it slowed the release of labour or because farmers were reluctant to use product

markets. Yet large farms and wage labour also existed in other parts of Europe, but these were often associated with poverty, tradition, and limited migration, rather than change. There was also plenty of 'peasant' agriculture in England, not to mention the Celtic fringes, which, according to this argument, might have been expected to have a negative impact on urbanization, migration, markets, and so on. The fact that Wrigley finds significant evidence for growing employment in traditional activities in the retailing and manufacturing sectors throughout the country suggests, perhaps, that farm structure was not as important after all. Wrigley also dismisses recent arguments by economists such as North on the importance of institutional arrangements and property rights. Yet a quick tour around other parts of Europe would indicate that these were sometimes important obstacles to growth. In particular, the links between city and country were often weaker because of institutional, as well as physical, obstacles to trade.

Although the author has revised many of the essays to minimize repetition, those who read the book from cover to cover will inevitably wish that, on occasions, the pruning had been a bit more vigorous. But this is a book that specialist and general readers will want on their bookshelves. The wide range of topics and the richness of the argument will fully reward those readers who want to understand why England was so different, even though it remained a traditional economy until so late.

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