

Economics 210a: Spring 2009

Introduction to Economic History for Berkeley First-Year Graduate Students...

Jan de Vries

Barry Eichengreen

J. Bradford DeLong, Department of Economics, U.C. Berkeley #3880, Berkeley, CA 94720-3880; 925 708 0467;
delong@econ.berkeley.edu.

Office hours: Evans 601, W10-12, 2-3, and by appointment; email delong@econ.berkeley.edu or phone 925-708-0467;
website: <http://delong.typepad.com/>

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Tuesday, January 20, 2009

Outline for January 21, 2009 Econ 210a Class: Introduction/A Malthusian Economy?

Administration <http://braddelong.posterous.com/delong-and-eichengreen-spring>

I'm going to try to juggle eight things--three snippets I threw up on my version of the website, my notes, and four articles...

Why are we here?

- Selection from Solow (1985) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/1805620.pdf>

Does economics have "invariant" laws?

- Yes: based in human nature: Smith (1776) <http://www.adamsmith.org/smith/won-b1-c2.htm>
- No: dependent on social arrangements: Marx (1859) <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface-abs.htm>

Before the commercial revolution:

- J. Bradford DeLong: January 21, 2009 Econ 210a Lecture Notes <http://tinyurl.com/dl20090120c>
- Jared Diamond (1987), "The Invention of Agriculture: The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race," Discover <http://tinyurl.com/dl20090112d>
- Gregory Clark (2005), "The Logic of the Malthusian Economy," draft of chapter 2 of A Farewell to Alms (published version: Princeton University Press, 2007) <http://tinyurl.com/dl20090112e>
- Gregory Clark (2005), "Living Standards in the Malthusian Era," draft of chapter 3 of A Farewell to Alms <http://tinyurl.com/dl20090112j>

Why was the pace of innovation so slow in the old days?

- M. I. Finley (1965), "Technical Innovation and Economic Progress in the Ancient World," Economic History Review, New Series, 18:1, pp. 29-45 <http://tinyurl.com/dl20090112f>

What conclusions did Malthus draw from his "Malthusian" theory?


- <http://tinyurl.com/dl20090120d>: It is, undoubtedly, a most disheartening reflection that the great obstacle in the way to any extraordinary improvement in society is of a nature that we can never hope to overcome. The perpetual tendency

in the race of man to increase beyond the means of subsistence is one of the general laws of animated nature which we can have no reason to expect will change. Yet, discouraging as the contemplation of this difficulty must be to those whose exertions are laudably directed to the improvement of the human species, it is evident that no possible good can arise from any endeavours to slur it over or keep it in the background. On the contrary, the most baleful mischiefs may be expected from the unmanly conduct of not daring to face truth because it is unpleasing. Independently of what relates to this great obstacle, sufficient yet remains to be done for mankind to animate us to the most unremitted exertion. But if we proceed without a thorough knowledge and accurate comprehension of the nature, extent, and magnitude of the difficulties we have to encounter, or if we unwisely direct our efforts towards an object in which we cannot hope for success, we shall not only exhaust our strength in fruitless exertions and remain at as great a distance as ever from the summit of our wishes, but we shall be perpetually crushed by the recoil of this rock of Sisyphus...

- It is a perfectly just observation of Mr. Godwin, that, 'There is a principle in human society, by which population is perpetually kept down to the level of the means of subsistence.' The sole question is, what is this principle? is it some obscure and occult cause? Is it some mysterious interference of heaven.... Or is it a cause, open to our researches, within our view, a cause, which has constantly been observed to operate, though with varied force, in every state in which man has been placed? Is it not a degree of misery, the necessary and inevitable result of the laws of nature, which human institutions, so far from aggravating, have tended considerably to mitigate, though they never can remove?.... It seems highly probable, therefore, that an administration of property, not very different from that which prevails in civilized states at present, would be established, as the best, though inadequate, remedy for the evils which were pressing on the society...

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