

Andrew Jakabovics

Week 7-

1. Stupid Red Sox.

2. The entire endeavor is predicated on a Malthusian model. How appropriate is that model in a pre-industrial society where large segments of the population are either self-sufficient or rely almost exclusively on an informal economy?

3. While Wrigley and Schofield detail their assumptions (I admit, I didn't read the appendices this week...), how sensitive are those assumptions to small changes in inputs? They rely heavily on backing into their older population figures based on newer and more complete data sets. A measure of variability of the results would have been useful. Likewise, how much of a selection bias is there? Given the thousands of parishes in England, there is no reason to assume that the ones they used were random. In fact, given their specified criteria of using complete records rather than fragments that cover only part of the time period, we might conclude that the data set is based on atypical parishes.

4. The title begins "The Population History." The authors acknowledge that their work is a reconstruction. What claims to objectivity are implied by the use of the definite article? Would "A Population History" have been more appropriate? Wrigley and Schofield acknowledge in their introduction that taking England as a single unit is liable to mask certain trends (i.e. falling mortality rates offset by a shift to unhealthy cities in the 19th century). They defend the decision by saying a regional approach would have been too much work and made the book too lengthy. Might they not have been better off tackling a shorter time span (say, one in which the technology of production remained relatively constant) and analyzing it more locally?

5. Wrigley and Schofield detail the assumptions they make about the costs and benefits of having children in a household. (They eat a certain amount, and once they reach the age of 10, they are assumed to help around the farm.) Where is a similar analysis of women? Have they implicitly discounted the value of women's work? Are they simply assumed to produce children? Aside from eating only about 80% of what boys do, how are females valued before marriage? Everett Hughes, in his ethnography /French Canada in Transition/ discusses the impact of the shift from an agrarian economy to an industrial economy. One major difference in the two is the fundamental unit of economic producers. In the agrarian society, the fundamental unit is the farm or the household, where the value of the produce is shared collectively by the family. Once the economy industrializes, an individual is paid directly for his/her labor. Wrigley and Schofield start in an agrarian society and finish tabulating their figures in an pre-industrial society. They provide a set of flowcharts that demonstrate the Malthusian equilibria in each century. Do these iterations of their fundamental model change sufficiently to account for the shift from collective earnings to individual wages?