Davidson, N. (2017) Agricultural Enlightenment: Knowledge, Technology, and Nature, 1750–1840Agricultural Enlightenment: Knowledge, Technology, and Nature, 1750–1840. By Peter M. Jones (New York, Oxford University Press, 2016) 268 pp. $100.00. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 48(2), pp. 253-255. (doi:10.1162/jinh_r_01135) [Book Review]

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Review of *Agricultural Enlightenment: Knowledge, Technology, and Nature, 1750-1840*. By Peter M. Jones (NewYork, Oxford University Press, 2016) 268 pp. $100.00

There have been surprisingly few attempts to draw out the connections between the Enlightenment and the contemporaneous transformation of agriculture. In an important new book that seeks to remedy this situation, Jones suggests that, in the light of the currently dominant conception of the Enlightenment as a purely intellectual movement, his project might be regarded as "somewhat unusual, perhaps even perverse" (5). But as he rightly points out, the majority of Enlightenment figures did not see their work in that way. Equally important, from the perspective of this journal, the world of knowledge that they inhabited had not yet been divided into a series of arbitrarily defined disciplines. To take only the most obvious example, the political economy associated with Adam Smith is not "economics" as currently practiced (whether or not we consider it a "science"); it also contains elements of what would now be included in economic history, social geography, politics, and even psychology. Part of Jones' achievement in this book is therefore to recreate the "pre-disciplinary" eighteenth-century world through an "interdisciplinarity" capable of encompassing theoretical debates about, say, physiocracy (17-20), as well as the seemingly more germane contribution of animal manure to soil fertility (181-184).

Agricultural Enlightenment does not claim to be a total history of the Enlightenment in the manner of Israel's recent work.[1] Rather, as the title and organizing principle ("research paradigm") suggest, it seeks to understand something in the way of a social movement, albeit a diffuse one, intent on changing agrarian practice. For those who were enlightened, this orientation involved "a concern for attainable, incremental improvements in day-to-day conditions of living" that also opened up potential benefits for states: "Governments

[1] See, for example, Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (New York, 2002); *idem*, *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton, 2011).

interpreted the phenomenon of Enlightenment as both an opportunity for and as a guide to the extraction of wealth from the land" (217). Jones also makes clear that agriculture during the Enlightenment involved shifts in culture and belief in addition to changes in technique or ownership. In many respects, the book is constructed as a critical endorsement of Mokyr's argument for incorporating the role of "useful knowledge" into our understanding of agrarian growth after 1750 (6, 214-215).[2]

Jones' previous book, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, Technology and Culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands 1760-1820* (Manchester, 2008), was in many ways a major departure from his previous work as a specialist in the last stages of France's ancien regime and early revolutionary era. In the current book, Jones works within a similar, but slightly broader, time frame, 1750-1840 rather than 1760-1820, concluding at the point when countries at the leading edge of development had overcome the technical limitations to agricultural growth. But his geographical sweep is much wider than in the preceding work, encompassing Western and Central Europe. He is justifiably skeptical of claims by Pomeranz and the California school that the more advanced areas of the Chinese Empire and Europe--the "East" and "West"--showed no significant differences in productivity, though he lapses into the inadequate shorthand about it that everyone else often does.[3] As he notes toward the end of his book, "If the West succeeded in bringing together in a unique combination the ingredients for sustained agriculture and industrial growth, it began doing so long before the start of the nineteenth century" (228).

In his attempt to demonstrate the West's priority in agriculture, Jones carefully avoids two misleading extremes into which earlier analysts have fallen. One, to which the California school is prone, refers to an undifferentiated "West" (meaning, in this case, Europe and its North American extensions), which misleadingly implies that countries like, for example,

[2] Joel Mokyr, *The Gifts of Athena: Historical Origins of the Knowledge Economy* (Princeton, 2003).
[3] Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, 2000).

England and Portugal, were always on the same plane. The other approach, associated with Brenner and other Political Marxists, is problematical for the opposite reason, claiming that England alone experienced endogenous capitalist agricultural development.[4] In contradistinction to both views, Jones is suitably attentive to the unevenness across the continent, particularly in relation to the role of the state (Chapter 2), while showing an appreciation of English, and ultimately British, distinctiveness.

Jones is fully aware of the difference between England and Britain. He devotes one of two case studies to Scotland and the other to Denmark (147-160). These useful discussions demonstrate that the two countries underwent much more rapid and intense development than most of the rest of Europe, though under different state forms, and that agricultural enlightenment there overlapped most closely with the process known by the much more venerable term of "agricultural revolution." Jones defends the use of this term only if it is not intended to convey that the process was inevitable (even where agricultural enlightenment had taken place) or relatively quick, as many previously thought. Outside his case studies, Jones moves confidently across a range of different countries (as might be expected, his discussion of France is particularly strong [46-51]).

Like any work covering a wide geographical and chronological expanse, this one has occasional errors. The most startling one is the claim that Thomas Malthus was a "Scottish economist" (133); the clergyman was born and worked most of his life in Surrey, England. A more serious issue is the inconsistency with which Jones deals with the political contexts of the agricultural enlightenment. He provides background about the Prussian agrarian reform during the Napoleonic Wars, for example, but not about the considerably more decisive crushing of the Jacobite movement in Scotland after 1746, which rendered feudal agriculture unsustainable and led directly to some of changes that he analyzes. Overall, however, this

[4] Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653* (Princeton, 2003).

major contribution to our understanding of the history of both ideas and economic development casts welcome light on a number of related themes, ranging from the role of technology to attitudes about the natural environment.

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