

**Turchin, Peter, and Sergey A. Nefedov. *Secular Cycles*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009. vii + 349 pages. Cloth, \$35.00.**

What is the motive force of history? Peter Turchin, a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Connecticut, and Sergey Nefedov, a senior research scientist at the Institute of History and Archaeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, attempt to provide an answer to that question with a masterful, interdisciplinary synthesis of evidence that points to the answer in demographic-structural theory *à la* Jack Goldstone. Secular cycles are the long-term oscillations of history that characterize agrarian societies at the regional scale. They are typically several centuries long and divided into three phases: an integrative phase marked by social stability and expansion of power (and often territory); a stagflation phase marked by economic distress among commoners and rising consumption among elites; and, a disintegrative phase inaugurated by crisis and marked by depression and civil war. Their argumentation proceeds through a series of eight case studies covering medieval and modern England, France, and Russia, as well as ancient Rome (the Republic and the Principate). In so doing, Turchin and Nefedov apply the scientific method to historical analysis. They outline a cause-and-effect model of secular cycles, test it in the context of regional histories, and end up with a set of laws that the authors assert are universal in their application to the pre-industrial world. To counter the criticism that the case studies are Eurocentric, Turchin and Nefedov encourage readers to delve into Chinese dynastic histories and Khaldunian cycles of the Arab realm.

The shadows of Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo loom large over Turchin and Nefedov's search for history's motive force. Neo-Malthusian demographers will feel vindicated by the theory of secular cycles. Classical economists will relish eight case studies demonstrating Ricardo's law of diminishing returns. Marxists, however, will avert their gaze from a theory that is predicated on a symbiotic relationship between elites and peasants, and a competitive relationship between elites and the state. Secular cycles seem to explain more variation over time in power relationships than does class struggle. Geographers and ecologists will recognize the important role of the biophysical environment in influencing the course of history. Malthus predicted catastrophe when the size of a population reached the carrying capacity of that population's territory. The theory of secular cycles incorporates Malthus's "positive checks" on population growth by identifying them as triggers of the disintegrative phase. When carrying capacity is exceeded, the stagflation phase of a secular cycle begins. Then, when a famine or epidemic strikes, the disintegrative phase begins. This pattern is demonstrated consistently in England, France, Russia, and ancient Rome.

To identify secular cycles in their regional contexts, Turchin and Nefedov mine deeply the annals of history. Out of their thorough literature review, they have pulled the quantitative data needed to test their theory. They have presented it, whenever possible, in the form of tables and graphs, of which there are well over a hundred. As one might expect, the availability of data is greatest for England and least for ancient Rome, yet in each case study the authors present a persuasive argument that the model of secular cycles holds for agrarian societies over time. Some of the data the authors draw upon appears regularly in the academic marketplace. Prices and their well-known cyclic behavior, for instance, are used as indicators of integration and disintegration in every chapter. Other data is surprising in its availability: coin hoards have been discovered in England, France, Russia, and ancient Rome, and are interpreted as indicators of social turmoil during the depression phase of the cycle. Another interesting data set is the rate at which temples, churches, and public build-

ings were erected – interpreted as an indicator of the expansion phase of secular cycles. The elegant presentation of the quantitative data and its theoretical justification contribute to the readability and persuasiveness of the book. Another factor that makes the book easy to follow in its argumentation is its tight organization; a common template is used for each chapter (overview, expansion, stagflation, crisis, depression, conclusion). Though this is a work of scientific history, it is easily accessible to a lay readership.

Carrying capacity is a concept that is easily operationalized for agrarian societies, such as those featured as case studies in *Secular Cycles*. In the era before globalization, it is easy to imagine growing numbers exceeding the ability of the environment to provide sustenance. As technology overcomes the friction of distance (and permits increased production), food and other resources follow global networks around the world, making carrying capacity an increasingly meaningless concept. Theoretically, urbanization and globalization should bring the regime of secular cycles to an end. Does demographic-structural theory still apply to agrarian societies in the least connected areas of the world, such as much of Africa and Asia? As a test of its universality, it might be tempting to apply Turchin and Nefedov's model of secular cycles to non-European regime failures of the twentieth century. Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Uganda, all agrarian societies, come to mind immediately. It is also tempting to apply secular cycles to the twenty-first century, but at the global scale. Planet Earth became an "urban marble" in 2007. Does that mean we are living in a post-secular-cycle world? Controversy over the carrying capacity (though we are loath to use that term) of the Earth itself has become one of the sequelae of the climate change debate. However, if we take the phases of secular cycles and apply them to the Earth in the early twenty-first century, we should be able to make some predictions. Just imagine a secular cycle at the global scale: the integrative phase of the late twentieth century, followed by a stagflation phase, awaiting a triggering event (perhaps rooted in climate change) that brings about a disintegrative phase.

In sum, Turchin and Nefedov's book clarifies our understanding of the past, but it should also sharpen our perspective on the future.

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**Wright, Patrick.** *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. xxv + 290 pages. Paper, \$19.95.

Oxford University Press makes the bold claim that Patrick Wright's *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* "put 'heritage' on the map" when it was first published by Verso in 1985. The subsequent appearance of specialized academic journals, led by the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, indicates that heritage has indeed acquired its own literature. There is little doubt that the so-called heritage and tourism industry has proliferated around not only Britain but many other parts of the world. These facts continue to make Wright's insights extremely valuable.

The updated Oxford edition of Wright's work includes three notable sections. First, there is a new preface in which the author replies to his critics and assesses the current state of heritage studies. Second, is an appendix that reproduces a similar conversation