Reply to Jones

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Historians are from Mars and political scientists are from Venus (or was it the other way round?). The most striking feature of Erik Jones's stimulating and generous response to my article is the way in which it highlights the divergent approaches to the postwar era adopted by historians and political scientists. In many respects, this is a very good thing. We need the stimuli provided by those rooted in different traditions bringing their distinctive approaches to the same subject matter, just as, for the early medieval period, historians, archaeologists and literary scholars confront the fragmentary evidence of post-Roman Europe in contrasting but often mutually enriching ways.[1]

It is nevertheless remarkable, and also depressing, how little communication there has hitherto been between political science and history in the field of post-1945 Europe. There are familiar general reasons for this situation, notably the pillarised structures of academe in which practitioners of the two disciplines pursue different careers, attend different conferences and occupy different buildings or simply different floors within the same building. But there are also reasons particular to the study of postwar Europe. The ascendancy of a model-based approach to political science in which history was absent or reduced to the status of an evidential mine was reinforced by the slowness of historians to regard Europe after 1945 as anything more than the period 'after the war was over'. Much, on both sides, has now changed, and there is clearly space for an approach that draws on both disciplines. In this respect, I can only echo the powerful plea of Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann in their introduction to the excellent volume *Life After Death*, published after I wrote my initial article:

> Over the past few decades one of the main preoccupations of modern European historians . . . was how to explain the path *into* fascism and war . . . How did Europe get into a Second World War even more bloody than the First? How was humanity pushed down the road to Treblinka? Relatively little thought was given, until rather recently, to the question that, for us and the world we inhabit, is probably even more important: How did people emerge from these horrors? We have given enormous thought to how Europeans got into fascism and war; the time has come to understand, in social and cultural as well as political and economic terms, how Europeans got out.[2]

Nevertheless, good intentions are not enough. There is also much work to be done, above all in terms of familiarising ourselves with the work which each discipline has

[1] See, for example, the multiple perspectives in Peter Linehan and Janet Nelson, eds., *The Medieval World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001). I owe this reference to my colleague Lesley Abrams.

[2] Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann, 'Introduction. Violence, Normality and the Construction of Postwar Europe', in Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann, eds., *Life after Death. Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe during the 1940s and 1950s* (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute, and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13.

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already accomplished. I hope I am not the only twentieth-century historian who has a guilty sense of my limited familiarity with the political science literature on post-1945 Europe. At the very least, we should perhaps resolve to read each other's footnotes.

Mutual familiarity will not, however, erode certain obstinate points of difference. Some of this is evident in Erik Jones's response to my article. There is much in his argument with which I would largely agree, notably the emphasis that he places on the differences between the postwar west European welfare states. Indeed, many historians would make that point more emphatically than he does. The ghost of many a *Sonderweg* debate hangs over much of the historiography of postwar Europe, and no serious historian of France, Germany, Italy or Sweden would wish to abandon entirely the idea that their post-1945 states were the product of a distinctive passage to mass politics and modernity.[3] My argument would be a slightly different one: without trying to wipe away these different paths, I would wish to stress the way in which most states followed much the same trajectory during the twenty-five years after the end of the 1940s. Why, in brief, a path towards convergence, rather than continued divergence?

More fundamental differences between my approach and that of Jones emerge over two related issues: my location of a terminus to 'Europe's Democratic Age' in the early 1970s and my wish to see the preceding postwar decades as a single period. Here again, I find it easy to concede certain points to Jones. My choice of the terminus date of 1973 was not intended to single out the events of that year. It was principally an attempt to draw a line in the sand somewhere beyond the more conventional and, to my mind, less satisfactory date of 1968. In making that choice, I was concerned above all to emphasise the differentness that I sense between the preceding decades and the much more murky era that stretched through the tense decade of the 1970s to the changes that surrounded the pivotal date of 1989, in both west and east. Nor, of course, did I wish to wipe away the changes that took place within the era 1948–73. Where, however, I would wish to differ concerns Jones's counter-theses that the stability of the postwar years was more apparent than real, and that the real watershed lay in the events of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Jones's points about the changes taking place at that time within states such as the Netherlands and Belgium are well made. So, too, is his emphasis on the process of European integration, where I am aware that my argument rests perhaps rather insecurely on the Milward thesis of the obstinate resilience of the nation-state. Yet, for any historian approaching these events (as most of us inevitably do) through the prism of the preceding decades in European history, it is difficult not to be impressed by the relative success with which the political cultures of western Europe managed the social tensions and political

[3] Political science is far from immune to this tendency. Comparative historical studies by political scientists often reinforce the emphasis on national differences by seeking to isolate crucial variables between different European states. See, for characteristic examples, Sheri Berman, *The Social Democratic Moment: Ideas and Politics in the Making of Interwar Europe* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1998); and Carolyn Warner, *Confessions of an Interest Group. The Catholic Church and Political Parties in Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

conflicts of the 1950s and 1960s. To borrow Jones's words, the threat of instability did indeed exist throughout; the collapse of the Fourth Republic in 1958 serves to remind us of that fact. But it is the solitary instance of the demise of a political regime within this period, and my concern was therefore to explain more why the regimes worked rather than analyse the problems that threatened their viability.

Stability is perhaps not the best word to use to describe this reality. As Jones suggests, it implies a stasis that fails to give due weight to the rapid economic growth of the postwar decades. But I would be reluctant to embrace his thesis of 'a fundamental transformation' in European democracy in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Arguments about continuity and change do of course tend to be futile. However, perhaps the larger point at issue here is the impact of postwar economic growth. I feel that we have to take a step back from the dominant economics-led interpretation of postwar politics in which the rising tide of prosperity gradually covers and transforms the social and political landscape of Europe. Clearly, the new material world that existed, especially in northern Europe, had changed a great deal by the 1960s. It is, however, not merely historical pedantry to point out that the timing and rate of economic growth varied considerably between European states;[4] and that almost everywhere its fruits were distributed unequally. More importantly, we need to recognise what was not changed by economic growth. There is perhaps a personal dimension at work here. Many of us, both historians and political scientists, are ourselves products of the forms of social mobility that came into existence at this time. Drawn from backgrounds outside the existing intellectual elite, we (male and female) ascended the social escalators put in place by changes in higher education, and lead lives markedly different from those of preceding generations. But we need to remember that we are exceptions rather than rules. The meta-narrative of deracination and mobility in the 1960s is already within us, and is reinforced by novels and films that are also the products of intellectuals.[5] Historians of, for example, socialist working-class milieux or Catholic cultures of the 1960s would not dismiss the impact of the changes taking place at that time, but see them more as a slow revolution that came to fruition gradually over the decade stretching from the late 1960s onwards. But, rather than trading statistics of relative change and continuity in electoral behaviour or social mobility, I would suggest that we should focus on the durability of the political cultures brought into existence after 'the great watershed' at the end of the 1940s.[6] The new institutional and political structures that came into existence at that time largely succeeded not because of their intrinsic value, but because they provided a relatively flexible and inclusive framework of political bargaining which conciliated elites, blunted ideological conflicts and rewarded participation. These were modified by evolving processes of economic growth and social modernisation. It was, however,

[4] Nick Crafts and Gianni Toniolo, 'Reflections of the country studies', in Nick Crafts and Gianni Toniolo, eds., *Economic Growth in Europe since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 577.

[5] To cite, rather randomly, three such autobiographical representations of the1960s in film: *Toto le héros* (dir. Jaco van Dormael, Belgium/France/Germany, 1991); *La vie sexuelle des belges 1950–1978* (dir. Jan Bucquoy, Belgium, 1994); *Antonia* (dir. Marleen Gorris, Netherlands/Belgium/UK, 1995).

[6] The phrase is again taken from Bessel and Schumann, 'Introduction', 4.

only at the end of the 1960s that there was, in my view, a more profound shift in that political culture.

These of course are issues of interpretation on which reasonable people can and should disagree. Our answers might differ, and will no doubt continue to do so. But, if nothing else, exchanges of this kind might have the consequence that we shall finally begin to ask some of the same questions.