

Introduction

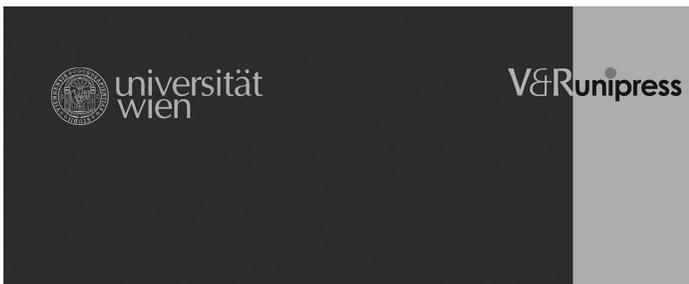
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What are the causes of the wealth and poverty of nations? Why are some countries rich while most of them remain poor? Peer Vries's book *Escaping poverty. The origins of modern economic growth* (2013) claims that to answer these questions, the emergence of a new kind of economic growth in the long eighteenth century must be explained. What causes the emergence of long-during, sustained, substantial growth in one part of the world and its non-emergence at the time in the rest of the world? The book provides a systematic analysis of the most important arguments and answers in the debate on the Great Divergence by means of an exhaustive dissection of possible explanations. In this volume eight renowned observers debate Peer Vries's book from a range of perspectives, raising a number of observations and questions that frame the Great Divergence Debate as it is, and that can guide the debate towards its future. How can we understand processes of regional convergence/integration versus divergence/hierarchy within a global framework? How do we relate tensions of divergence within a context of increased connections? Why does increased integration go along with increased differentiation? These fundamental questions connect to three central themes and debates in contemporary world history: scales (regions, states, the global), methods (comparisons, connections, systems) and knowledge (data, analysis, interpretation). These are addressed in the papers in this volume.

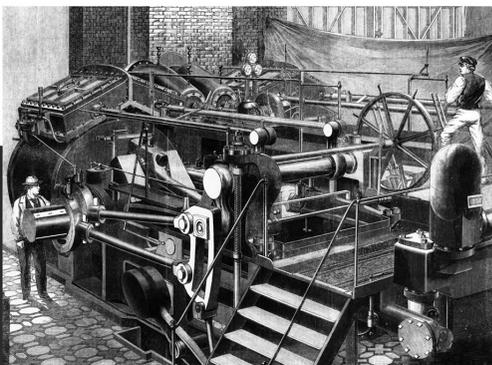
The Great Divergence is the single most important debate in recent global history. Regardless of how it fares in future research, it has enlarged and redirected the long-standing convergence/divergence dispute in social sciences. It unlocked new fields of research, introduced new approaches and created new data and knowledge. It has sharpened the discussion on the potentials and limits of a 'global' or 'world' perspective. It has opened up fixed narratives that universalize particular, space-time bound experi-

ences. Most authors in this volume agree that the roots of the Great Divergence need to be explored in all their complexity, related to a wide-ranging process of social change. Peer Vries's book shows clearly that single-factor explanations, even stretched to (and over) the breaking point, are unable to cover the enormous range of transformations and innovations that arose with the emergence of modern economic growth. The dynamics within the Great Divergence debate push it to go beyond its own terms and to transcend its own limits. Perspectives and methods tested within the Great Divergence Debate challenge more general interpretations of the history of global capitalism.



Peer Vries
Escaping poverty

The origins of modern economic growth



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