

The Dr A.H. Heineken Prize for History 2006

The work of Professor Joel Mokyr presented by Professor Willem Th.M. Frijhoff, Chairperson of the Jury of the Dr A.H. Heineken Prize for History

Prize citation: for 'his research into the origins of the modern industrial economy'

Professor Mokyr,

The jury of the Dr A.H. Heineken Prize for History has unanimously decided to award you this year's prize for your outstanding research into the origins of the modern industrial economy. You are a world authority in the field of economic history. I could mention the numerous books you have authored or edited; your work as the editor in chief of the five-volume *Oxford University Press Encyclopaedia of Economic History*; the countless scientific articles you have published, many of which have sparked off significant debates; your work as a journal editor and board member, most recently as the president of the Economic History Association; and your many visiting professorships in various countries. All these achievements confirm not only your talent as a scholar, but also your outstanding reputation. Indeed, the Netherlands saw fit to honour that reputation on a previous occasion, when you were elected to the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2001 as a foreign member.

You have conducted groundbreaking research into the origins of the modern industrial economy, in particular the role that technology and knowledge plays in economic progress. After completing your dissertation (Yale 1974) on the industrial revolution in the Low Countries – a work that established your name as an exponent of New Economic History – you wrote an equally notable study on poverty and starvation in Ireland in the first half of the nineteenth century. Your next work was based on a growing awareness of the interplay between technology and economic progress, an interplay that is in fact not a recent development but one of long standing. In 1990, you published *The Lever of Riches. Technological Creativity and Economic Progress*, an erudite, inspiring study that has received many well-deserved awards and has been translated into many different languages. In this work, you explore the reasons for innovation and creativity throughout European history, in comparison to the history of China.

Your most recent book, *The Gifts of Athena: Historical Origins of the Knowledge Economy* (Princeton/Oxford, 2002), goes a step further. In this penetrating study of the origins of the knowledge economy, you analyse the interaction between different types of knowledge within the context of economic progress. How is useful knowledge generated? How did the accumulation of knowledge in the eighteenth century lead to the Industrial Enlightenment, which formed the basis for the process of industrialisation for centuries thereafter, and what political economy of knowledge can we derive from this? You show that economic progress will eventually grind to a halt if a society's knowledge base is too narrow or access to that knowledge base is impeded. Your analysis offers scientists, as well as politicians and policy-makers, a mirror in which they can see a reflection of contemporary society.

Professor Mokyr, you are an American citizen but were born in the Netherlands and moved to Israel at an early age, where you studied at the Hebrew University. Since obtaining your Ph.D from Yale University, you have worked at Northwestern University (Evanston, Illinois), becoming a Robert H. Strotz professor there in 1994. You are one of the very few economic historians to emphasise interdisciplinarity in your work. You not only specialise in the history of economics, technology and medicine, but you also use

concepts and theories drawn from such fields as demography, cognitive psychology and philosophy. At the same time, you remain a skilled and congenial ambassador for your discipline, economic history, including in the land of your birth, the Netherlands. Your insights into the development of the knowledge economy will continue to be of inestimable value to us.

It is my privilege to congratulate you on your prize.