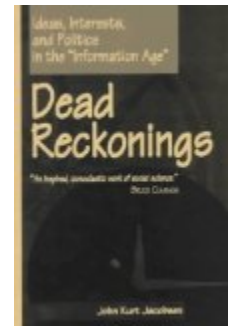


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

John Kurt Jacobsen. *Dead Reckonings: Ideas, Interests and Politics in the "Information Age"*. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1997. xv + 238 pp. (cloth), ISBN 978-0-391-04030-4; \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-391-04007-6.

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Published on H-Pol (February, 1998)



Reckoning with International Relations

Dead Reckonings, a volume of collected essays by John Kurt Jacobsen, constitutes a series of critical essays on some of the most recent and most prominent scholarship on international relations ("IR"). Jacobsen tackles the assumptions and conclusions of IR scholarship in a series of chapters on ideas, the state, high technology, trade policy, and the politics of Northern Ireland. Jacobsen borrows from the insights of Paul Feyerabend, who has been dismissed as, alternatively, an anarchist, a cynic, and a relativist, among other labels; Jacobsen sees him as a "marxist outlaw." Following Feyerabend, Jacobsen points out the fact that ideas and interests are inseparable substantively (even if they may be distinguished analytically). Jacobsen takes on the work of neo-realists, to be sure, but he also does not hesitate to criticize those who, like he, focus on the importance of ideas (in contrast to rational-choice oriented research, for instance), on the other hand. Jacobsen's work, although essentially interpretive, is based on a close reading of IR scholarship and a detailed knowledge of several case studies; it is written for students of international relations, although it would also be of interest for students of Jacobsen's particular cases. The volume concludes with two short postscripts on the political culture of interpreting the Korean War and of representing the Holocaust.

The fundamental contribution of *Dead Reckonings* is its persistent emphasis on the interested-ness of social science: the fact that IR scholarship, like other social science, is necessarily political—embedded in assumptions about power relations, political reality, and the realm of

the possible. Jacobsen repeatedly points out the politics at stake in international relations—and even IR scholarship. These politics almost inevitably shake out in favor of elites, rather than broader democratic interests of the populace within OECD states.

Dead Reckonings is an exciting and clear-eyed work: it is cognizant of the normative dimensions that are necessarily present in social science; it is explicit about the essential provisionality of scholarship; it confronts the elite-centered assumptions of much of IR scholarship, even that of the "constructivist" camp; and it refuses to be constrained by current trends in IR scholarship. Instead, it attends to the larger empirical world within which social scientists find patterns and designs. In this sense it is very much current history (a fact suggested by the phrase "Information Age" included in the subtitle, by the title of the introductory chapter "a new *Fin de Siecle*," and by the reference to "postindustrialism" in a later chapter)—appreciative of and grounded in the empirical realities of contemporary life.

As a series of collected (and related) essays, the frustrations of *Dead Reckonings* are in large part the result of the very virtues and success of Jacobsen's skirmishing action. One wishes that Jacobsen built a sustained case for his own Feyerabend-inspired theory of international relations, rather than relying on his commentary on the work of others on a varied set of cases. Given Jacobsen's apparent grasp of microelectronics policies in several nation-states and of the politics of Northern Ire-

land, to give two examples, it is well possible that Jacobsen could have expanded one or more of his chapter studies into a book-length treatment of his own perspective on IR.

Similarly, one wishes that Jacobsen developed more fully his acute observations on the making of political culture in the cases of a WGBH documentary, "Korea: the Unknown War," and of Steven Spielberg's version of the Holocaust manifest in "Schindler's List." Jacobsen succeeds in whetting appetites, but not satiating them by, say,

developing separate arguments on the malleability of historical and political interpretation, on the distorted processes of the creation of political culture, or, on the limits on what are regarded as even the most progressive media outlets in the United States.

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Citation: Bartholomew H. Sparrow. Review of Jacobsen, John Kurt, *Dead Reckonings: Ideas, Interests and Politics in the "Information Age"*. H-Pol, H-Net Reviews. February, 1998.

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