

Philip Thody. *An Historical Introduction to the European Union.* London and New York: Routledge, 1997. xxvi + 117 pp. \$14.99, paper, ISBN 978-0-415-17107-6.



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A circle of twelve yellow stars, but with fuzzy edges fading into shades of blue, purple and violet - that was the cover of Irish rock group U2's 1993 album, 'Zooropa.' Some lines in the title song ran, 'And I have no compass / And I have no map.' Two years after Maastricht, these lyrics captured a widespread feeling among the citizens of the newly founded European Union. How should they grasp the complexity of the Union's structure if even experts have difficulties in finding their way?

In his 'Historical Introduction to the European Union,' Philip Thody sets out to help people see the forest again for all the trees. In only 105 pages, he tries to give an 'introduction to the essential history, economics and politics of the European Union [that] assumes no prior knowledge.' As emeritus professor of French Literature at Leeds University, he writes from the position of an educated European citizen, rather than as an expert, to other citizens. Some of the advantages and disadvantages of such an endeavor are immediately apparent, even if one has not read the book: An extensive discussion of the Union's histo-

ry and features in the light of contrasting interpretations are hardly to be expected within such limited space or from an author with no particular background in the current debates in integration studies. Instead, in providing a map to European integration, Thody necessarily simplifies matters, as it is the purpose of a map to do, and for which task he might well be better suited than any political scientist trying to convey the EU's complexities.

The result makes for quite an enjoyable read. Light and refreshing in style, full of historical examples and clarifying analogies, and balanced but never hiding the author's own position, the book starts off with an historical overview of European integration, from the Schuman Plan to the current round of enlargement debates, before summarizing the organizational set-up of the EU and its institutions. Thody then moves on to discuss some basic principles of European governance, located particularly in the economic realm, and discusses the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), regulation of the Single Market, and financial contributions of member states as 'contested practices.' Finally,

just before finishing off with a short, three-page conclusion, Thody presents the major pros and cons with respect to Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). It is the chapters on CAP and EMU which stand out as the most useful, especially for students who have not yet been introduced to EU practices. Here, Thody's illustrative style and his ability to present dry and complex matters in an interesting and understandable way is most visible, since these issues are among the most technical of European integration.

But the book also has its problems. First, the title is somewhat inappropriate. Those who expect Thody to present detailed accounts of the prehistory of European integration, the diplomatic struggles leading up to its current institutions, or the set of ideas behind them, will be thoroughly disappointed. None of this is in the book, which starts, for instance, only in 1950 and ignores both the extensive debates about Europe's future in the resistance movements during World War II and the important role of the Marshall Plan and the OEEC in the run-up of what Thody might consider to be the actual integration process. There is no mention of the Congress of The Hague in 1948, the discussions of which would have provided a background to a multitude of integration scenarios against which Thody could have developed his narrative (1). And one does not find many references to the long intellectual history of integration (2). Thody does point out that the 'more grandiose projects' of European integration by Ortega y Gasset or Coudenhove-Kalergi (in contrast to Monnet's neofunctionalist strategy) have one thing in common: they 'have all failed' (p. 104). But while this may be true, one may also think of them as laying the groundwork for European integration by establishing the entity of some such thing as 'Europe' in the first place.

It is such discussions that are missing from Thody's 'historical' introduction. Instead, the term 'historical' refers to a whole range of historical examples against which European integration is set.

These indeed often shed some new light on the subject, or enable the reader to distance himself from the heat of current debates. There is, for example, the well-known observation from economic history that modernization of agriculture threatens the existence of traditional peasants, and that this threat is thereby not caused by the CAP as such. Thody chooses to remind his readers of the greater context of such arguments by quoting from Oliver Goldsmith's 'Sweet Auburn,' written in 1760 (p. 70). Toward the end of the book, he discusses Thucydides' 'Melian Dialogue' - not to prove, but rather to refute Bernard Connolly's claim that monetary union will finally establish German domination of Europe (3). This, Thody claims, is rather to do with a certain Euroskeptic 'Thucydidean' reading of the current situation than with the actual unfolding of events (p. 1).

These references make the book worthwhile to read. But they also indicate a problem. Thody's position as an informed citizen is located in the heart of the British debate about European integration. Thus, nearly all his examples are taken from this debate, and so Connolly becomes a major reference point. For readers from elsewhere, the centrality given to certain 'Euroskeptic' views in the UK is much overstated; other illustrations simply don't work. The many arguments refuting Margaret Thatcher's claim that the EU would bring in socialism through the back door (e.g. on pp. 73-4 and 99) are a bit awkward in this respect because many readers located outside the neoliberal Britain of the 1980s will in any case have found Thatcher's views comic more than anything else, and definitely not worth spending lots of energy to discuss. All of this makes the book a wonderful little piece for those working on Britain and the EU, and for those interested as British European citizens in the integration process. But for others, it becomes less interesting (which is quite surprising, given Thody's background in French studies).

This problem is exacerbated by the fact that Thody does *not*, contrary to the promise on the backcover, 'incorporate the most recent research.' The literature he recommends for further reading, being a rather short list in the first place, consists in large part of various sorts of handbooks written in the early 1990s. The widespread debates about 'the nature of the beast' -- to what extent is this a new kind of governance, a form of a 'postmodern' polity -- are not considered (4). One may think of these debates as too academic for such an introduction, but leaving them out forces Thody to stick to a very state-centered vision of European politics, and it leads him to oversimplify current debates into pro/anti-European dichotomies and history into a straight continuation from EC to EU. With respect to the latter, it is more than a minor oversimplification to state that the EC simply 'preceded' the EU (p. 55), and thereby to reduce the EU to an economic organization (p. 74). In fact, the EC is one of the three pillars of the EU, and this pillar structure may well be crucial in understanding the 'nature of the beast.' Once more, Thody's reading tells us more about the widespread tendency within the UK to conceptualize the EU as an 'Economic Community' than about 'how the Union works' (5).

The EU is a political system that is in constant flux (much of what Thody writes about EMU already is outdated), and it is increasingly a system to which the old maps, centered around territorial states, do not apply. Thody's account of European integration, with all his historical analogies and comparisons, is interesting as a first reading in European studies courses (especially in the UK) because it poses questions that otherwise often pass unasked. It is, however, insufficient as an introduction to the changes of Europe's international system that integration has brought about. The map and compass that Thody provides might not work in this new context, and we need some new ways to think about the political world of which we are part. After all, as U2's "Zooropa" continues,

'And I have no reasons / no reasons to get back' (6).

Notes

[1]. For documents on these events, see Lipgens, Walter / Loth, Wilfried (eds.): *Documents on the History of European Integration* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1985ff). A still excellent introduction to the early history of European integration is provided in Urwin, Derek: *The Community of Europe: A History of European Integration since 1945* (London and New York: Longman, 2nd ed., 1994). Unfortunately, Thody only refers to the first edition in his suggestions for further reading.

[2]. Apart from many studies tracing the idea of 'Europe' back into antiquity, this is dealt with in a refreshing way by Wilson, Kevin and van der Dussen, Jan (eds.): *The History of the Idea of Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2nd ed., 1995).

[3]. Connolly, Bernard: *The Rotten Heart of Europe* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995).

[4]. The references are to Risse-Kappen, Thomas: 'Exploring the Nature of the Beast: International Relations Theory and Comparative Policy Analysis Meet the European Union,' in: *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 34 (1996), no. 1, pp. 53-80; and Ruggie, John Gerard: 'Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations,' in: *International Organization*, vol. 47 (1993), no. 1, pp. 139-174, respectively.

[5]. On the notion of 'Economic Community,' with particular reference to the British context in comparison to France and Germany, see Jachtenfuchs, Markus, Diez, Thomas, and Jung, Sabine: 'Which Europe? Conflicting Models of a Legitimate European Order,' in: *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 4(1998), no. 4, pp. 409-445.

[6]. U2, 'Zooropa,' in: 'Zooropa' (Polygram International Records, 1993).

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