

John H. Dunning

Seasons of a Scholar: Some Personal Reflections of an International Business Economist

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Economists' autobiographies are not famously good reads. Practitioners of 'the dismal science' are seldom renowned for their engaging storytelling. Of course, it makes a big difference if you know the person. John Dunning had international influence and links beyond academia and was widely respected for his balanced judgement and ethical principles. His book tells of the influences on his life – personal and professional – and does so in great detail. He was a Baptist minister's son, working as a junior clerk after leaving school, then being conscripted into the navy at the end of the Second World War, before going late to the University of London and beginning an academic career. That career was centred at the University of Reading in the UK where he became the first Professor of Economics in 1964 and stayed until he retired in 1992, continuing as an emeritus professor and actively researching, publishing, consulting and conferencing until his death earlier this year.

Dunning was best known for his research work on transnational corporations, although he had other interests in industry economics and regional and urban studies. Analytically, his best known contribution was the 'eclectic paradigm' which emphasised that foreign-owned value-added activities would tend to occur when firms have privileged access to income-generating assets, can use them beyond their home-country, and prefer to do so themselves rather than to lease permission to foreign firms. Professionally, his highest accolade – other than the OBE he was awarded in 2008 – was his appointment in 1972 to the UN's Group of Eminent Persons to study the impact of multinational corporations on economic development. The title of one of his previous books, *Making Globalisation Good*, sums up the essence of his approach – balancing the pros and cons of corporate globalisation and seeking to reconcile profit-driven economic change with social benefit. It was an admirable endeavour – about as good as it gets within mainstream economics – but sitting uncomfortably alongside the critique of transnational capital coming from more radical traditions in political economy.