

ineffective in this regard. Moyn calls for a worldwide egalitarian political movement—a new utopia—to challenge neoliberalism, arguing that it must be premised on *enthusiasm* for government, not rejection of it (p. 219). Such a movement must thus either abandon or completely reformulate human rights.

In earlier work, Moyn sketched what such a reformulation might look like: a mobilizational politics operating beyond the legal domain and seeking direct influence and control over state policy through a human rights discourse no longer privileging individualistic norms and civil and political rights (*Human Rights and the Uses of History*, pp. 143–46). Ironically—as numerous outraged online commentators have pointed out—this is precisely what human rights politics *already looks like* in much of the world, from the farms and favelas of the Global South to the neglected cities and forgotten rural communities of North America. Moyn has simply ignored the grassroots human rights politics happening all around him. He ignores their invocations of human rights against inequality (think of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers) and ignores the rights-based transnational political solidarity emerging in opposition to neoliberalism (think of the World Social Forum process). The author dismisses—without consideration—this work as ineffective and misguided, and ultimately as an obstacle to the very emancipation for which those engaged in it are struggling. This strikes me as both impudent and counterproductive, given his stated political commitments (which, by the way, I happen to share).

What is needed now is a correction to Moyn's over-correction: a history of modern human rights struggles that draws out their explicitly *political* character. Such a history would build on the many valuable insights of Moyn's work—showing, as he argued previously, that the international human rights movements of the 1970s represented an apolitical or antipolitical turn and, as he shows in *Not Enough*, that their emphasis on sufficiency is a mistake (from an egalitarian perspective). Such a history would also show that human rights are tools that can be used for many purposes, not all of them laudable. Most importantly, however, it would show that whether human rights can be used effectively in challenging neoliberalism is a political question, not one that historians (or philosophers, for that matter) can decide.

#### **Adam Smith: Systematic Philosopher and Public**

**Thinker.** By Eric Schliesser. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 432p. \$74.00 cloth.  
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— Roni Hirsch, *Van Leer Jerusalem Institute*

Eric Schliesser's new book, the culmination of two decades of research, is a scholarly feat of the first order and an asset to Adam Smith's expansive readership across disciplinary divides. The book investigates the systematic nature of

Smith's work, not, as one might expect, as an economic thinker but as a philosopher. This shift in focus gives immediate context to Smith's political economy within an Enlightenment project dedicated to the flourishing of individuals, communities, and nations. The book's structure reflects this philosophical emphasis, starting with the basic elements of human and social life, followed by their application to social structures and processes, and concluding with the life of the philosopher as a public figure, reformer, and guide.

As stated in the Introduction, Smith's position on systems is cautious and ambivalent. On the one hand, systems please humanity's "aesthetic desire for 'order' and 'harmony,'" but on the other, an overly zealous "spirit of system" threatens to treat humans as means rather than ends (pp. 6–7). Above and beyond its nuanced exegesis on an extraordinary variety of themes—from monetary theory to religion and to happiness—the stakes of this book are therefore distinctly political: It is the statesman, as Smith warns, not the state, that requires a system (p. 10). The task of philosophy becomes to delineate and safeguard the boundaries between the two.

One of Schliesser's main arguments is that Smith has not one but two philosophical systems: a system of "anthropic" philosophy and a system of knowledge making. The latter, an (incomplete) system of systems, determines how a human science is constructed and outlines the moral and political limits of all systems (p. 16). Two of Schliesser's core concepts demonstrate the interconnectedness of Smith's systems: "Smithian social explanation" and "environmental rationality." Smithian social explanation is rooted in a theory of the historical development of natural human propensities, which grow intermixed and institutionalized through social interaction. Social "effects" are "locked in," refined, and maintained by their beneficiaries (pp. 33–34). This is true, for example, for our "propensity to barter," which evolved into the modern institutions of divided labor and market exchange, as it is true for language, born of our ambition to rule and control through persuasion (pp. 27–30). With this definition of Smith's social explanation, Schliesser distinguishes between social entities that emerge from permanent human needs, evolving over centuries, and artificial creations, the products of philosophy, policy, or local habit that yield temporary patterns and institutions. Importantly, the much-invoked "invisible hand" mechanism is an example of the latter only (p. 234).

A second core concept in the book is "environmental rationality," a proto-evolutionary feedback mechanism. Schliesser argues that for Smith, our emotions, ideas, and behaviors are driven by a constant need to make sense of our surrounding environment. A well-ordered society is one in which "expectations match the world's natural order" and where "the right kinds of habits" of conduct and especially of thought are cultivated. Morality,

rationality, and sanity are experienced as fit with one's environment, while immorality, but also curiosity and inquisitiveness, begin as a form of alienation (p. 67). This idea of "fit" is especially significant for Schliesser's analysis of Smith's political and social theory. The legislator must preserve a coherent environment, even as he or she adjusts the guiding principles of society toward greater enlightenment. Similarly, the public philosopher revises social ideals and truths while respecting the rootedness of all knowledge in some degree of error and superstition (p. 271). Environmental rationality, therefore, allows Schliesser to recognize the methodological and pedagogical value that Smith places on historical explanation. History teaches the scientist that his or her truths are temporary and the reformer to accept the constraints of local prejudice and "confirmed habits" in institutional design (pp. 184–85).

Political theorists will be particularly interested in the way that Schliesser applies these core concepts to Smith's account of the moral foundation of institutions and his proposals for social reform. He follows Smithian social explanation from our natural propensity, in a social context (p. 46), to seek praise and praiseworthiness, to the emergence of general rules of conduct and social institutions (p. 96). He emphasizes the role of sympathetic identification: Smithian individuals adopt the point of view of idealized others on their conduct. As they develop, they internalize an "impartial spectator" as a social reference point. Environmental rationality then explains how this impartial spectator continues to adapt to perceived changes in our environment (p. 138). As Schliesser shows, the idea of an impartial spectator highlights the importance of the objects of our admiration: That which inspires us becomes that which shapes our inner world and consequently our society. This helps him explain Smith's ambiguity toward the admiration of wealth and greatness, characteristic of commercial society, which engenders respect for the given order and replaces the "fawning kind of persuasions common in hierarchical societies" (p. 32), but also corrupts our better nature, breeding contempt for true enlightenment (pp. 140, 229).

In Schliesser's reading, Smith is a social reformer deeply concerned with stabilizing our environment while promoting change—an avowed gradualist. Smith's proposals aim to reconcile his profound critique of inequality with the need to preserve order and hierarchy. It is only under a stable status quo, Smith believed, that claims to justice can be made (p. 375). There is a tension, therefore, between Smith's social conservatism and what Schliesser convincingly depicts as his theoretical "bias" in favor of the working poor, calling for measures such as progressive taxation (p. 199) and extensive market regulation by the state (p. 220). Tempering some of the recent scholarly enthusiasm with Smith as a champion of the poor, Schliesser illustrates Smith's relative restraint by comparing him to his more radical students and readers, most

notably Sophie de Grouchy, who argued for a comprehensive restructuring of social norms and institutions (e.g., pp. 94, 211).

Finally, Schliesser's approach offers valuable insight into some of the less discussed facets of Smith's thought, including the role of luck in the human condition and Smith's philosophy of science. Fortune, chance, and uncertainty, the author argues, "govern the [Smithian] world" (p. 128). "For Smith," he writes, "the ultimate point of law is to reduce uncertainty and generate reasonable expectations that secure liberty and flourishing" (p. 202). Schliesser's discussion of the "piacular"—"the feeling that arises when we have been an involuntary cause of another's harm" (p. 122), motivating atonement—offers a fascinating cross-section of this ethical-political nexus. The uneasiness that emerges from the piacular, a regret or shame divorced from any sense of direct blame, signals the recognition of the "moral significance of fortune," of ourselves as a cause (p. 123). For Smith, the sentiment also carries institutional ramifications. The "price" of atonement, for example, is relative to the importance of the social institution violated (p. 126). Conversely, the early success of the church is due to its more efficient "market of consolation," replacing sacrificial atonement with prayer (p. 132).

The book also presents a valuable analogy between science and politics. Schliesser's account reveals how Smithian science looks and works a lot like any other community: It relies on the individual's need for approval, on widely spread, internalized norms and models, and on recognized means to update and replace them (p. 304). Scientific theory is thus perfected by exploring, not bracketing, its failures and inaccuracies (p. 263). Schliesser's Smith is a predecessor to Thomas Kuhn (p. 271), and a successor of Spinoza (p. 237), depicting a scientific community that evolves in complex dialogue with myth and superstition, which make knowledge about the world both accessible and agreeable (p. 286). The scientific urge, moreover, resembles the impulse of the legislator or the virtuous person. Curiosity is a passion rooted in the uncomfortable sense of surprise and wonder that motivates us to seek better explanations and greater harmony with our environment (p. 354).

In *Adam Smith*, Schliesser offers a comprehensive and balanced guide for the uninitiated, and a fresh perspective for the well acquainted, one that includes wide coverage of Smith's main interlocutors (David Hume in particular) and contemporary scholarship. Given the project's profound engagement with the Smithian corpus, some might find its self-consciously exegetical and scholarly focus overly limiting, especially in light of Smith's recent resurgence. While the author intentionally avoids explicit intervention in various contemporary debates, the book nonetheless invites readers to draw their own parallels and conclusions. It demonstrates, rather than argues, Smith's

continued relevance to our present day with its discussions of uncertainty, populism, and the moral crisis posed by extreme inequality. The book is also helpful in pointing to the limits of Smith's applicability, for example, his endorsement of a somewhat static society or the centrality of the local example in his economic theory. More directly, the author asks us to accept Smith as an exemplar of publicly responsible systemic philosophizing (p. 375). In that, the book is a call for debate and reflection on the role of philosophers today, proposing a Smithian focus on social reform combined with public enlightenment.

**Carl Schmitt's State and Constitutional Theory:**

**A Critical Analysis.** By Benjamin A. Schupmann. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. 232p. \$81.00 cloth. doi:10.1017/S1537592718002785

— Duncan Kelly, *University of Cambridge*

Can it really be true that modern democracy is at an end, possibly already dead, or if not, in a case of near-terminal decline? That seems to be the sense of it from a range of modern political scientists who have written on the subject recently. But whether this is because democracy can no longer deliver the goods it once promised, or because it never did and we just did not notice, or because democratic politics has basically come to mean liberal politics, and the threats to liberalism and the threats to democracy have become one and the same, it is hard to know. In an era of near permanent scandal, too—climate change and information manipulation, vote rigging and election tampering, the coarseness of the public language of political discourse—it is doubly difficult to take the measure of things.

All of which routinely sends us back to the recent past for historical parallels. We know that democracies have ended before, and that no forms of politics can be eternal. We also know that we cannot predict the future, only lay out possible developmental trajectories based on the evidence we have, but the evidence we have is itself limited. Amid our current crises of confidence, many colleagues seem to think that the closest historical parallels to our present moment are the 1930s, with failures of liberal democracy and economic strategy leading to forms of authoritarianism, populism, and antiliberal racism. Then, even such resolute liberals as John Maynard Keynes, liberals who well knew that the future is never like the past, admitted that global liberal capitalism really could not “deliver the goods” and needed to change. Today, however, we remain trapped in the hyperbolic present outlined by Frederic Jameson, where it actually seems easier to imagine the end of the world than it does to move away from a system of capitalism.

Nevertheless, if our politics can be both like and unlike the 1930s simultaneously, might some of the questions asked *then* about the nature of democratic competition,

state strategy, and the people amid economic uncertainty and populist demagoguery, still give us guidance *now*? In some ways, that is the opening gambit of Benjamin A. Schupmann's detailed and compelling reconstruction of Carl Schmitt's state and constitutional theory.

Schupmann begins, in fact, with the question of whether or not democratic politics can knowingly commit suicide. If it can, then perhaps it is worth considering again why that might be, and why it looked that way in the early years of the twentieth century, amid the modernity of mass democracy. This was, after all, a very live question in German politics and theory between 1930 and the end of 1932, when the issue of whether or not the “negative majority” of Nazis and Communists in the Reichstag could be forced out of their legislative deadlock by the constitutional and executive authority of the president, who in turn could try to constrain and limit the powers of a new chancellor, Adolf Hitler. So far, so familiar. But the complexity and systematicity of these debates about the relationship between law and politics under stress are often forgotten. Schupmann brings them back to life, focusing on the background formalistic assumptions of legal and state positivism within the academy, which came into conflict with more substantial and organic views of democracy and popular sovereignty.

For Carl Schmitt, of course, the route through these two extremes, namely “liberalism,” fudged the obvious differences he perceived between the merely legal dimensions of state positivism and the substantive legitimacy of popular sovereignty upon which these claims were based. So how could these claims be thought through at exactly the same time as a legally authorized chancellor was altering the constitutional fabric of a democratic society to turn it into a one-party state? Again, we know that this is part and parcel of a well-known story about how Schmitt, a vain and difficult man seeking proximity to power, came to carve out an intellectual and political career. But at the same time, what is new in Schupmann's account is that he offers something of a “continuity thesis” for thinking about Schmitt's work. Schmitt was, on his reading, always concerned with the limitations of modern liberalism, seeking to shake liberals from their dogmatic slumbers in order to see the real dangers around them (pp. 27ff), rather than simply wishing them ill and hoping for authoritarianism from the get-go.

What, then, were those dangers? Well, some were conceptual—the problem of toleration applied to democratic politics particularly, where the principle of an “equal chance” for those ambivalent about liberal democracy can lead to a situation where a democratic polity allows itself to be subverted from within. People make decisions that might bring about a situation in which they are no longer allowed to make any decisions at all, and democratic politics presumes that they should be allowed to. Versions of this thought are routinely applied to angry debates about whether