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**Review of Eric Schliesser's *Adam Smith: Systematic Philosopher and Public Thinker***

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Eric Schliesser, *Adam Smith: Systematic Philosopher and Public Thinker*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. xxiv + 407. £55 (hb.). ISBN: 9780190690120.

Eric Schliesser's *Adam Smith: Systematic Philosopher and Public Thinker* is a very welcome addition to the secondary literature on Adam Smith for two reasons. First, not only does the book offer interesting insights into Smith's moral, political, and economic philosophy, it also covers less-trodden ground such as Smith's epistemology and philosophy of science and social science. Second, the book makes the case that Smith is a systematic philosopher and public thinker.

Schliesser's book is divided into three parts. In the first part, Schliesser discusses Smith's accounts of human nature and social explanation. In addition to discussing familiar Smithian themes such as conscience, the impartial spectator, and moral rules, Schliesser analyzes Smith's account of the passions and argues for, amongst other things, the two following claims: (a) Smith makes a distinction between natural and moral sentiments (the latter are inherently normative, since they are cultivated and include reliable expectations about others' responses); (b) Smith's account of human functioning includes instinctual responses and innate mental content, and it is thus not a Humean empiricist account. Furthermore, Schliesser examines Smith's accounts of

good judgment, judgments of propriety, and the sympathetic mechanism, and brings out the role of causal analysis inherent in these accounts. He shows that the sympathetic mechanism relies on counterfactual reasoning and that judgments of propriety pertain to the proportionality of causal relations. Schliesser also applies his analysis of Smithian human nature and social explanation to Smith's account of justice and treatment of moral luck. In regards to the latter, Schliesser offers a subtle interpretation of Smith's account of the 'piacular'—when A is the unwilling cause of B's misfortune—which he uses to reveal the intricacies of Smith's approach to moral evaluation.

In the second part of the book, Schliesser deals with Smith as a social philosopher, discussing his political philosophy, political economy, and philosophy of science, including a nuanced discussion of Smith's 'invisible hand' passages. Schliesser argues, amongst other things, that: (a) Smith is a consequentialist in his evaluation of social institutions; (b) Smith's tax regime and political economy are geared toward benefitting the working poor. Schliesser argues that these commitments follow from Smith's moral theory, especially his conception of human flourishing and liberty. Nevertheless, when it comes to the relations amongst nations, Schliesser demonstrates that despite Smith's advocacy for peaceful coexistence and the rule of law and despite his criticism of slavery and forceful extension of civilization, Smith's constitution of an Atlantic empire is biased against non-white subjects. What I found of particular interest is Schliesser's discussion of Smith's philosophy of science as a social, reason-giving enterprise, in which our emotions play a crucial role. He also argues that Smith is a fallibilist, a proto-Kuhnian, and a modest scientific realist, who is reserved about the application of mathematics to political economy and even terrestrial sciences. Schliesser concludes the book with a short third part in which the idea of Smith as 'public thinker' comes to the forefront. In particular, he discusses

theology and philosophy, arguing that Smith believed that theology is subservient to morality and, importantly, that philosophy has a key public role to play in commercializing societies.

Schliesser's book is a very comprehensive work on Adam Smith's philosophy that engages with numerous current debates and goes beyond them in interesting ways. It contains much by way of offering novel readings of Smith's texts, placing Smith's work in its broader intellectual context, and engaging with the secondary literature. The book will thus be of interest to Smith scholars from all disciplines. I wish to conclude, however, with two critical comments. First, Schliesser claims that his book is about Smith as a systematic philosopher. He takes this to mean that Smith has a 'system of scientific systems', not merely in the minimal sense that Smith was interested in meta-philosophy, but in the more robust sense 'of having coherent and connected explanatory principles' (6). However, Schliesser's book is written in such a modular fashion that it is not always easy to see the connections between the various parts of the book and thus to appreciate what this 'system of scientific systems' amounts to. To be sure, Schliesser brings out some of Smith's underlying explanatory principles in several domains of human enquiry. But in a book that downplays Smith's own deflationary comments about systems of philosophy in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* [TMS] (1.1.3.3, 1.1.4.5, 6.2.2.17), Schliesser could have done a bit more to explain how Smith's explanatory principles relate to one another within a given domain and, even more so, across different domains, so as to produce a 'system of scientific systems'.

Second, some of Schliesser's more innovative claims could have used additional textual support. For example, Schliesser argues that Smith is not an empiricist, but bases his case on sections 79-81 & 85 of 'External Senses', in which Smith merely claims that: (a) bodily appetites include 'some anticipation or preconception of the pleasure' inherent in their gratification; (b) our desire to gravitate towards the agreeable and our sense of smell presuppose some notion of

‘externality’ or ‘external thing’ (56-58). Schliesser also offers a non-empiricist reading of section 6.3.23 of TMS, where Smith discusses ‘the idea of exact propriety and perfection’ that ‘exists in the mind of every man’. Schliesser argues that there is ‘non-trivial innate content’ (59) suggested in this passage, despite the fact that Smith explicitly states that the idea in question is ‘gradually formed from [...] *observations*’. Another example is Schliesser’s claim that ‘aspects of superstition play an essential [...] role in the workings of our moral life’ (135). This claim is supported by only four passages from TMS—three from the final edition of the book—where Smith’s appeal to superstition is rather trivial. For example, in one of these passages, Smith merely notes that our natural sympathy with the imaginary resentment of victims of murder is the origin of ‘the horrors which are supposed to haunt the bed of the murderer, the ghosts which, superstition imagines, rise from their graves to demand vengeance upon those who brought them to an untimely end’ (TMS II.i.2.5). To be sure, these controversial claims about Smith’s innatism and focus on superstition are intriguing, and it would certainly be interesting to see additional analysis supporting them.

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