

## OTHER BOOKS OF INTEREST

### The Wealth of Nations: A Tradition-Historical Study

**Michael J. Chan**

Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2017 (289 pages)

Appearing in the second series of Mohr Siebeck's *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* ("Old Testament Research"), Michael Chan's study examines a particular "constellation" or traditional motif as it appears in the Hebrew Bible. Chan calls this constellation the Wealth of Nations Tradition, which is characterized by three elements: "(1) the nations of the earth bring their (2) wealth to a (3) royal figure as an act of homage, honor, and submission" (21). This tradition is found in many texts in the Hebrew Bible, including 1 Kings 10; Psalms 68, 72, 76, and 96; and in several places in the book of Isaiah. Chan painstakingly interrogates every one of these texts, as well as related texts from the ancient Near East, and he collates and compares his findings. Readers should be advised that this is an academic book in the field of Old Testament studies intended for scholars in that field. Thus the author works in the ancient languages (in transliteration), though he usually also includes English glosses and translations. It is also important to note that Chan undertakes the examination of these texts not merely for the sake of understanding them, but as proof of his method. The Wealth of Nations Tradition, he says, serves to "demonstrate the viability of the tradition-historical approach"—an approach that looks at the "presuppositions" of a text and its "intellectual background" (21, 14). Beyond the field of Near Eastern studies, theologians and historians of economics who are used to reading technical biblical studies may benefit from this exhaustive treatment of this ancient theme.

## Freedom in Sweden: Selected Works of Erik Gustaf Geijer

**Erik Gustaf Geijer**

**Björn Hasselgren (Editor), Peter C. Hogg (Translator)**

Stockholm, Sweden: Timbro, 2017 (445 pages)

Erik Gustaf Geijer (1783–1847) was the sort of erudite and dynamic thinker who transcended disciplinary boundaries and ideological labels. He was a poet, composer, historian, political philosopher, and member of Sweden’s parliament; and he has been labeled (even in his own time) as an adherent of different, even contradictory, schools of political and philosophical thought. *Freedom in Sweden* begins with an introduction by economic historian Lars Magnusson, who orients the reader to Geijer’s context, contributions, and complexity. Particularly of note here is Geijer’s indebtedness to both the Scottish Enlightenment and German Idealism. Next, the editor, Björn Hasselgren, reflects on a few essays from Geijer’s *The Poor Laws and Their Bearing on Society* (1842), which was until now some of the only work by Geijer available in English. *Freedom in Sweden* adds six essays to Geijer’s English corpus: his early prize-winning nationalistic essay, two wide-ranging studies of the history and development of the European political and economic order, an essay on the history of slavery, and a translation of Geijer’s 1844 lectures in history. The volume concludes with a literary flourish: Geijer’s “An Economic Dream.” This very short piece, the last of Geijer’s essays published in his lifetime, recounts a dream of economic collaboration and complexity—a vision of a unified national economy arising from national diversity. *Freedom in Sweden* gives us just a sampling of Geijer’s writings on history, political economy, and social issues, but it offers English-speaking scholars in these fields a priceless gift: a fresh perspective from the past, and from outside the British and American contexts, by a scholar who defies facile labels.

## The Character Gap: How Good Are We?

**Christian B. Miller**

New York: Oxford University Press, 2018 (293 pages)

Are human beings basically good or basically bad? Its complicated. Or rather, *we* are complicated. So argues Christian Miller in this introduction to the philosophical, psychological, and practical aspects of human character. Miller is a professor of philosophy at Wake Forest University and he directs the Character Project, an international and multidisciplinary research program. He has also written extensively on character and moral psychology. *The Character Gap* is a distillation of his previous work and a survey of the psychological and philosophical research on this topic. It covers definitions (what character is and why it is important); the evidence of human character in action (an extensive review of psychological research, spiced with historical examples); and strategies for improving our characters. The book’s style is easy and conversational, and Miller makes the reader feel the complexity of our moral lives. The true stories of human viciousness are deeply disturbing, and the accounts of human virtue and compassion are uplifting and exhilarating. One of Miller’s main goals is to challenge our tendency to classify people according to classical (or contemporary) virtues and vices. Though he uses the terminology of virtue and vice throughout the book, he pushes against the notion that virtues and vices are traits that people *have* (20). The evidence, he argues, indicates that human beings usually do

not have either virtues or vices in any consistent, meaningful sense. Our characters are simply too mixed and affected by many motives and external influences of which we are often unaware. Yet, Miller is not content with our mixed characters. He argues that we should strive to be better people. Strategies for moral improvement are presented in the closing chapters, including a final chapter on Christianity as a promising contributor to virtuous character. *The Character Gap* is a careful and accessible entry point into the complicated topic of human moral character.

**Practicing the King's Economy: Honoring Jesus in How We Work,  
Earn, Spend, Save, and Give**

**Michael Rhodes and Robby Holt with Brian Fikkert**

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2018 (318 pages)

*Practicing the King's Economy* is authored by an urban development leader (Rhodes), a pastor (Holt), and an economist (Fikkert). The book appears “under the auspices” of the Chalmers Center for Economic Development, where Fikkert serves as president (30). As the title suggests, the book focuses on practical recommendations for a Christian “economy,” broadly construed. Topics thus include money and idolatry, generosity, giving, Christian community, work and wages, poverty and equity, investing, creation care, and Sabbath rest. These topics are grouped under six “keys,” with two chapters given to each key. In each pair of chapters, the first chapter discusses the biblical principles and the second unrolls practical applications with concrete, real-life illustrations. As the authors emphasize, the “practices . . . are *the heart of this book*” (51). The work of Old Testament scholar Christopher J. H. Wright (who wrote the foreword) is a prominent influence here. The authors draw heavily on Old Testament practices as they develop an ethic for the church’s contemporary economic life. As a practitioner’s guide, the book does not develop the hermeneutical and ecclesiological justifications for making the practices of Israel paradigmatic for the Christian church, though the endnotes point to some of the sources related to these deeper matters. Additionally, the authors’ governing motif is an expansive understanding of the New Testament notion of the kingdom of God and its economic implications. Thus they can refer, perhaps too loosely, to King Jesus’s “economic policies” and “programs” (34–35, 40). Overall, however, the book is an important challenge to those Christians and churches that tend to spiritualize Christianity at the expense of the external and physical dimensions of Christian practice, and the authors’ collection of story-driven practical suggestions is a storehouse of food for thought—and for action.

**The Opinion of Mankind: Sociability and the Theory of the State from  
Hobbes to Smith**

**Paul Sagar**

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018 (260 pages)

In this scholarly and provocative study, Paul Sagar argues that David Hume and Adam Smith were first-rate political thinkers who offered an alternative—and better—political theory to the Hobbesian and Lockean accounts. For Hume and Smith, the grounding of government and political authority was “the constant and contested changing swirl of opinion” (10). This is a vision, Sagar argues, “without a theory of sovereignty” (38) and

without a transcendent or theistic grounding, but one that is more ruggedly realistic and that has more explanatory power than the alternatives commonly offered. Sagar's study is wide ranging, with extensive discussions of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Mandeville, in addition to his principal subjects, Hume and Smith (though, between these two, Hume gets the lion's share of attention). Sagar's method is both historically descriptive and philosophically prescriptive. The prescriptive aspect comes into full view in the last chapter where he brings the insights of Hume and Smith to bear on contemporary political philosophy. This is the most provocative chapter in the book, and here Sagar's views reflect aspects of the so-called realistic political theory of recent years (218). Sagar also replies to the philosophical challenge that our social and political life cries out for a firm grounding in a transcendent moral order. His response is, in effect, to embrace the angst of a world without foundations or ultimate explanations. Here he goes all the way with Hume and resists "wanting something more, when it appears so stubbornly to be the case that more is not to be had" (240).

### Divine Currency: The Theological Power of Money in the West

**Devin Singh**

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018 (296 pages)

In *Divine Currency*, Devin Singh traces the deep connections between money-talk and God-talk in Christian theology. That is, if economy and markets inspire religious language, and if religious language includes monetary concepts and ideas, perhaps the relationship is not merely coincidental or ancillary. Perhaps there is a deeper, inseparable relationship between them—something more *essential* (Singh rejects that term and prefers the term *homological*). Still more, perhaps there is something sinister lurking in these depths: "If money lends its logic to the structuring of theology, God-talk repays by offering its prestige and sacred power to the world of exchange" (2). Despite the comprehensive scope suggested by the book's subtitle, *Divine Currency* is really a study in Christology, soteriology, and economy. It is an account of "God as an economic administrator and of Christ as God's currency" (7). The author's main sources are from the patristic era: Eusebius of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Constantine. The book is not for the faint of heart—or for readers unfamiliar with postmodern theology, its vocabulary, and its de/re/constructive method. There will be a vast methodological gulf between Singh and those readers who follow more traditional historical and theological methods. Singh is happy to "reconstruct" what he sees as "implicit" in his sources; he is pleased with novel interpretations, and in the end he even denies that he has offered a "historical depiction" (9, 24, 193). Singh does in fact reveal many convergences between theology and economy in his sources, and for this reason scholars working in these areas will find his account useful. However, since Singh's study is driven ideologically by critical theory and rooted in postmodern methodology, one suspects that readers will either welcome or reject it largely along ideological and methodological lines.

**The Stoics and the State: Theory—Practice—Context**

**Jula Wildberger**

Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos, 2018 (263 pages)

In the conclusion to this study, Jula Wildberger says she has focused on ancient Stoic “conceptions of the state and not of law or justice in themselves” (201). This statement seems a bit too modest, and it sells her contribution short. In truth, *The Stoics and the State* leads readers on a journey through not merely the Stoics’ political thought, but through many of the interconnected paths of their philosophy, including their concept of human sociability; their understanding of nature, law, and justice; their anthropology, cosmology, and theology; and the actual political practice of particular Stoics. As if that were not enough, Wildberger includes a final chapter that critically interacts with three important modern figures who have embraced aspects of Stoic thought: Justus Lipsius, Immanuel Kant, and Martha Nussbaum. The author manages to pack all of this superb content into a brisk 250 pages (though the type is small). *The Stoics and the State* is one of those rare academic books that engages in the nitty-gritty details and debates of its particular field but also appeals to scholars from a wide swath of academia. It may not have been Wildberger’s intent, but she has written a book that is simultaneously an authoritative account of Stoic political thought and a scholarly introduction to a school of thought that pondered the connections between the individual, the state, and the entire cosmos.