

He broaches the issue of voluntary versus nonvoluntary routes to equality—an important distinction. It is one thing to be part of a voluntary community, with the freedom to join and to leave. It is another to live under socialist laws in a nonvoluntary setting, like one's country, where one must adhere to the laws, even if one does not agree with them.

While acknowledging that nonvoluntary routes to equality have tended to be authoritarian—with “substantial costs in terms of freedom”—Abramitzky seems to gloss over the dire consequences. “People would prefer,” he summarizes, “not to give up their freedom to gain equality” (288). Yes, no doubt, but there is much more to the story—sadly, the brutal suffering and the millions of innocent people killed at the hands of communist regimes.

Also, in one subsequent paragraph, he briefly discusses the subject of high taxes and high redistribution—suggesting that debates on the issue reflect differing views on the costs and benefits. While cost-benefit studies can be helpful, high taxes and high redistribution cannot be evaluated based simply on utilitarian calculations. There are other, important normative considerations. What is just? What does economic liberty entail? What are our rights to private property?

Abramitzky's book can tell us much about the history of kibbutzim—its noble ambitions and its inevitable challenges. For those eager to espouse socialist solutions today, however, the story of these voluntary homogeneous egalitarian communities is not reassuring. How much more problematic is it to try to implement socialist ideas on a nonvoluntary basis within a diverse society?

The illustration on the book's jacket, a painting by Raphael Perez, depicts an idyllic vision of a beautiful, peaceful, happy, and industrious kibbutz community, replete with twinkling lights in the sky. If only it were so easy.

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## F. A. Hayek: Economics, Political Economy and Social Philosophy

**Peter J. Boettke**

London: Palgrave Macmillan (350 pages)

Peter Boettke's book on F. A. Hayek is a worthwhile read. It is suitable as an accessible and fair introduction to Hayek's ideas. The book, as the author explains, is meant as an account of the evolution of Hayek's thought, and that is what it offers. It traces, clearly and critically, Hayek's debt to Mises and the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers. Along the way it addresses distortions of Hayek's ideas and clarifies some typical misunderstandings. So the book points out that Hayek did not think that the price system was all that one should attend to if the market works to coordinate the networks of goods and services. Again, it reminds us that Hayek did not think that there was no room for the government to act, even if he did think that the market was an important institution. This book familiarizes the reader with the typical objections launched at Hayek's defense of the free market and

lays out nuanced clarifications and counter objections; a fair-minded reader will come away with a sympathetic grasp of Hayek's ideas and be armed with fitting responses if his or her sympathies are threatened. Quite a few pages are spent addressing the criticism that Hayek's argument for the inevitability of totalitarianism is a slippery slope fallacy.

Yet the book is in no way a preachy defense of Austrian economics. Boettke's book is especially valuable not only for Austrian sympathizers but also for those who want to truly grasp the core matter, as it were, for Hayek. This is because it traces well a key thread that grounds Hayek's ideas, and it is in laying out well and clearly this key idea in Hayek that his economic, political, and social theories come to life. This key idea can be unpacked in several ways, but it has to do with Hayek's assumption of what later came to be called "bounded rationality," as another Nobel Laureate, Herbert Simon, calls it. The belief is that human beings are not omniscient, but rather their intelligence is limited. A person may wish to indulge in Cartesian constructivism, or in plain English, the desire to plan and build things from scratch. But if that person does so he or she will not succeed. Boettke's book brings this idea out very clearly, and this is an important achievement in the book. And in laying out this different philosophical or economic anthropology, Boettke is able to explain how Hayek's ideas connect historically with Mises as well as Hume through Acton, and how these ideas evolved from these three thinkers. The limitations on our thinking and knowledge implies that we should not presume to disregard institutional structures that work to help us overcome these epistemic limitations. Nor should we presume to do more than we are really capable of doing. Immediately, the intelligent reader grasps the key warrants for Hayek's appreciation of the competitive market, and also the anxiety regarding socialist planning. Hayek's posture is one of humility.

Yet this is not all. Boettke's book also brings out well the idea that our ability to think and to know is somehow cradled in certain cultures or institutions. This is to say, certain cultural or institutional contexts are genetically responsible for our ability to think and to know. This is very important. It is not just that we cannot know everything. More than that, if we do think or know, it is thanks to the architecture of our context, including the undesigned existence of certain institutions, so to speak, that we are able to think well or know well. These architectural contexts and institutions are not designed by us—we could never have designed them given the limits of our rationality. These institutions came to be thanks to human action, but not human design. If we tear them apart, we will never be able to think them back, and we might not be able to think well anymore. In laying out this "heart" of Hayek's ideas, Boettke's book is not a mere historical account of who influenced Hayek, but an insightful study of the conceptual evolution of Hayek's ideas insofar as it tracks down one among many core concerns for Hayek: the folly of rationalist constructivism. Hayek's warning to us is that we ought to be humbly aware of our debt to our context, our institutions, and our environment. Thus we might recall that Hayek's argument for the right to private property is quite unlike St. Thomas Aquinas's. It is not that private ownership encourages the owners to better look after what is owned, but rather with property ownership comes the correlated ability to think freely—and perhaps, one might add, to discern morally without fear or favor, and to choose freely. Ideas like these

deserve a hardworking Thomistic retrieval, in my view. But for the present purpose, I am grateful that Boettke's reading of Hayek brings out clearly the insight that our rationality (and perhaps also practical rationality and not merely speculative rationality) is very much dependent on delicate institutional contexts. And once these are dismantled, thinking human beings are left wandering down an awry path toward unthinking, and human beings will be left without the possibility of thinking themselves out of a pickle.

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## What Is Classical Liberal History?

**Michael J. Douma and Phillip W. Magness (Editors)**

Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017 (268 pages)

This collection of essays explores classical liberal historiography and attempts to chart various paths forward for historians working in the fields of intellectual, social, political, and economic history. In the introduction to the book Douma argues that classical liberal history has as its methodological starting points an acknowledgment of human dignity and libertarian free will in the individual. Classical liberal historians study the contingent choices of human individuals in the past as they have sought to improve themselves in their economic, social, political, and cultural contexts over time. Classical liberal historians place stress on historical empathy, intellectual humility, and evidence in inquiries concerning negative liberty. In Douma's words, "classical liberal history is a record of the attempts to define and encourage individuals' freedom from ... outside threats, and to understand the economic, political, social, and cultural limitations to complete, unlimited freedom" (xi). Classical liberal history, as Douma articulates it, offers something of value to conservative and progressive historians, even though it is to be distinguished from both traditions. Despite liberalism's critique of conservatives' stress on order, conservatives will appreciate classical liberal history's emphasis on "methodological individualism" and aversion to "central planning" (xiii). Progressives will find resonance with liberals' affinity for human rights and their tracing of human improvement over time, even if liberals critique progressives for placing too much confidence in the inevitability of progress and for being too strident in their repudiation of Western civilization. The work gathers eleven essays that attempt to define classical liberal history and cast prescriptive visions for how it ought to advance.

Scott Shubitz critiques the coherence of the idea of classical liberal history, further arguing that liberalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries changed over time. He writes that historians of liberalism should be more critical of how earlier historians sought to shape liberalism to fit a particular ideology, and that more stress should be laid on the influence of religion along with economics in history. Phillip Magness suggests liberal historians take up the role as historical interlocutors through the joint tools of economic reasoning and evidentiary empiricism. In effect, this would turn away from