

to mention state and local government) regulatory leviathan of unelected bureaucrats creating barriers to growth and opportunity. Realistically, who is legislatively willing to effectively rein in this executive branch challenge? While industrial policy has its inherent—if not fatal—flaws in implementation, why not consider a national innovation strategy that focuses on efficiently coordinating a federal policy apparatus, not one focused on choosing specific “winners-and-losers,” but establishing a regulatory environment conducive to increasing and maintaining competition among American industries and sectors? Finally, where America’s manufacturing comparative advantage might be readily apparent in a global trade environment solidly built upon widely embraced international agreements, but not in the present deteriorating rules-based, international economic order. How does America parse domestic economic deficiencies in manufacturing—as it involves production of PPEs, pharmaceuticals, and semiconductor chips—from deficiencies in national security? While Gregg states that he is not focused on specific policy prescriptions, these existential issues remain a significant challenge for his system of choice—the American free market system.

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## Smithian Morals

**Daniel B. Klein**

Vancouver, BC: CL Press, 2023 (248 pages)

*Smithian Morals* is a collection of essays by Daniel Klein. Many of these essays were already published in various outlets, and they represent years of careful inquiry about topics ranging broadly from “Propriety in Adam Smith” and “Adam Smith and Self-Deceit” to “The Liberal Christening,” “The Rule of Law,” and “You Are a Soul.” You can download the book as a pdf free of charge at [https://clpress.net/site/assets/files/1091/smithian\\_morals\\_11.pdf](https://clpress.net/site/assets/files/1091/smithian_morals_11.pdf), or purchase the book online at <https://clpress.net/books/smithian-morals>. As one of Klein’s former students, I have had considerable interaction with his ideas over the years and think highly of him and his scholarship. Before exploring a few of the topics laid out in *Smithian Morals*, the reader should know some of Klein’s major commitments. He is an ardent defender of markets, but more than that, of liberty. But even beyond liberty, Klein advocates for classical liberalism and just sentiments—that is, that there are proper and improper, right and wrong ways to feel about the world around us and the behavior of our fellow men and women.

Klein’s broader project, of which this book is a part, includes reclaiming the word *liberal* from the collectivists who co-opted the word in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Klein despises the “governmentalization” of social affairs, not

only for its economic inefficiency, but much more for its moral corruption (127). He encourages people of good will to “come together” in Adam Smith. In Smith he sees an exemplar as well as a compelling advocate of markets and classical liberal order. In Smith’s works, Klein finds resources for our political, social, and cultural moment. More than just offering quaint policy recommendations, Smith teaches us how to think, feel, and talk about liberty and virtue: “Smith is here a supposed mentor, sage, exemplar, with whom we have an encounter, or even maintain a sort of friendship” (1).

In *Smithian Morals*, one finds an explication of propriety and justice. Propriety is rather a middle ground between praiseworthy and blameworthy behavior. It is appropriate but not strikingly laudable. Justice has various forms, but the most important kind according to Klein and likely according to Smith too, *commutative justice*, ought to structure our legal and political arrangements. Klein also discusses natural liberty (chaps. 12, 17, and 25) and justice (chaps. 3 and 21), while also highlighting Smith’s rebuke of the slave trade (chaps. 7, 8, and 9). Discussions of beneficence and morals appear throughout the work (chaps. 1, 2, 4, 5, 18, and 23). And, of course, one can find discussions about the origin and meaning of classical liberalism (chaps. 10 and 14), which entails “[t]he policy presumption of ‘allowing every man to pursue his own interest in his own way’” (129–30).

But what may be most interesting to readers of this journal, Klein occasionally ventures into the realm of metaphysics. Although he is a self-proclaimed agnostic, Klein has attracted a great many Christian graduate students (and a disproportionately high share of married graduate students). In his chapter about souls, Klein writes:

[i]t is useful and agreeable to think of yourself as a soul that owns its person. It is also useful and agreeable to think that there is a universal benevolent beholder of the whole.... It is also useful and agreeable to pattern your thoughts along the lines of benevolent monotheism, that each of us is made by God, and in his image. (212–13)

Klein seems to accept, and even laud, Christianity for everything but being true. Even its veracity he does not explicitly deny, as no true agnostic could. But his study of Smith, and specifically of the impartial spectator, has led him to use (dare I say believe in?) an allegorical being he calls Joy, who happens to have many of the traits of God.

Such a being is more compelling not as a logical or ethical construct, but as something, or rather as someone, with real metaphysical existence. Klein views benevolence in light of God or Joy (chap. 1). Yet he acknowledges “One of the many shortcomings of Joy, as compared to God, is that Joy does not easily lend herself as the object of a general gratitude for life and its blessings, since she has not given us life and its blessings” (7). But he still appeals to the existence of the impartial spectator when he discusses conscience (chap. 18) and corruption (chap. 19). Klein also writes that human beings are both souls and persons (chap. 27).

The essays in *Smithian Morals* leave us with a great deal of thought-provoking ideas, organized around the principles of liberty, justice, and moral judgment. We learn from Smith that overextensions of government power are corrupting, not just inefficient. Justice, in its commutative and legal sense, is precise and corresponds closely with the idea of property and the rule of law. Moral judgment involves give and take in social contexts as well as reflection and sympathy with others and with the impartial spectator—who at the very least has many godlike characteristics. Christians ought to take up and consider many of Klein’s arguments, eclectic as they may seem, that he has derived largely through his muse (and to some extent my own): Adam Smith.

—Paul D. Mueller

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## Scarcity: A History from the Origins of Capitalism to the Climate Crisis

**Fredrik Albritton-Jonsson**

**Carl Wennerlind**

Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2023 (290 pages)

This book is about the relationship between nature and the human economy, seen through the lens of scarcity. It is interesting from a couple of points of view. First, the book illustrates the difficulty of reconciling the canons of contemporary contextual historiography with presentist preaching. In this case the urgency of responding to the climate crisis overwhelms historical sensibility. Second, the book is an example of the combination of ignorance and tendentious interpretation that characterizes many treatments of religious thought by contemporary historians who are not specialists in this area.

In relation to historiography, let us see what the authors say about what they are doing:

After outlining the planetary crisis that in their view was caused by faulty ways of conceiving the relationship between nature and the human economy, especially that of neoclassical economics, the authors suggest that historical work can contribute to repairing the planetary crisis. They write: “We hope that readers of this book, by gaining a better sense of how people in the past have conceived of the nature-economy nexus, will be inspired to think imaginatively about alternatives to the neoclassical idea of scarcity” (3). Yet the authors are quick to differentiate themselves from the crowd of existing critics of neoclassical economics, on the basis that they are merely doing history: “To be absolutely clear, this book does not offer a critique of the usefulness or instrumentality of the neoclassical concept of scarcity—instead,