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E. H. H. Green, D. M. Tanner, eds. *The Strange Survival of Liberal England: Political Leaders, Moral Values and the Reception of Economic Debate.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. xiii + 313 pp. $99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-88167-8.

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Ideas and Twentieth-Century Politics

In 1936, John Maynard Keynes, the celebrated English economist wrote, "Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist."[1] Keynes, who plays a key role in the recent book *The Strange Survival of Liberal England*, expresses a viewpoint immensely suited to the approach taken in this volume. This volume of essays, inspired in part by the pioneering work of the political historian Peter Clarke, aims to address the connections between "'moderate' political and economic ideas and public policy and debate" (pp. 2-3). Although it covers a lot of economic ground, this book can truly be understood as a work of the "new political history," an approach that does not assume political history or political institutions to be static nor political leaders to be mere ciphers buffeted by unstoppable social or cultural forces. Quite simply, the new political historians believe that ideas matter in politics though in ways that are much more complicated than is usually thought.

The editors of *Strange Survival of Liberal England* have strong records in analyzing ideas in the context of twentieth-century Conservative and Labour politics. E. H. H. (Ewen) Green, who sadly died in 2006, is well known for his pathbreaking works, such as *The Crisis of Conservatism: The Politics, Economics and Ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880-1914* (1995) and *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (2002). Similarly, Green's coeditor, D. M. (Duncan) Tanner, has published widely on the Labour Party, with such key works as *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918* (1990). He has also coedited *Labour's First Century* (2000) and *Debating Nationhood and Governance in Britain, 1885-1939* (2006). It is a happy irony that these two experts in the Conservative and Labour parties have put together a collection of essays that focus on the enduring impact of Liberal ideas in the twentieth century.

The essays within *Strange Survival of Liberal England* are organized around three main sections–"Economic Ideas and Political Leaders," "The Use and Abuse of Economic Ideas: Keynes and His Interpreters," and "Economic Forces and Their Significance." To varying degrees, all three sections examine the relationship between ideas and politics. The agency with which political actors articulated and digested these ideas; the changing significance of political ideas in various institutional, cultural, and transnational contexts; the symbolism versus the actual content of such ideas; and the public's receptivity of these ideas are key themes that emerge throughout the book. The book is at its strongest in its first two sections in which the ideas and policies examined are relatively concrete and the political actors well known. The last section, while intellectually challenging, does not work as well because the economic ideas examined are too abstract or the key political actors remain off stage. In some ways, the book is a bit too ambitious in attempting to be both transnational and multidisciplinary. Overall, it is an excellent book, but it might have been better still if the editors had selected all the essays contained within to more clearly reflect the specific title of the collection.

The first section of provides the simplest initiation into the examination of ideas and politics. Three of the four essays within the section evaluate the impact of political ideas within well-known narratives of political history (the American entry into World War One and the breakup of the Labour government of 1929-31) or familiar political personalities (Robert Lowe, William Gladstone, Woodrow Wilson, and Ramsay MacDonald). The fourth focuses more on the examination of an issue or policy debate (the fight for minimum wage). However, it should be said immediately that none of these essays are merely re-

peating well-known stories in political history. In each, the authors show how the "practical men" within their studies were deeply affected by ideas. The first essay of the volume, by Boyd Hilton, closely reexamines the conflict between the Victorian Liberal prime minister Gladstone and his chancellor of the exchequer Lowe (which eventually led to the latter's dismissal). This disagreement is rarely understood as a battle of ideas. However, Hilton is able to show that, although each man had firm individualist and laissez-faire beliefs, Lowe took a more flexible managerial outlook versus Gladstone's unbending rules based administrative viewpoint. The third chapter by John A. Thompson examines the response of American liberals to American entry into World War One. Thompson shows how these thinkers, inspired by their British Liberal counterparts, formulated an economic explanation for American entry into the war, which has had surprising durability especially among revisionist historians. Thompson questions overt economic influence over Wilson's decision to intervene in the war but cleverly reinserts the economic explanation. He is able to do so by noting that Wilson's expansionist foreign policy goals of the war were rooted "in a consciousness of the nation's great economic and financial strength, and this surely helps explain the ambitiousness of his programme" (p. 110). The fourth chapter by Tanner reconsiders the much maligned decisions of MacDonald during the economic crisis of 1929-31 in light of the institutional structure and political culture of the Labour Party. This essay is particularly strong at showing how the acceptance and rejection of new ideas and policies was not solely a function of their intellectual merit. The symbolism of ideas as well as the way in which they were mediated through institutions was also crucial. The second chapter takes a slightly different approach to the other three. Written by James Thompson, this chapter looks at a policy debate rather than a major political clash or crisis. Of the four, this piece has the least clear argument. It is essentially an examination of the minimum wage debate among liberal intellectuals, economists, and labor activists and politicians in both Britain and the United States from 1880-1914. The response to minimum wage proposals by the various American and British figures in the essay is underlaid by their overall analyses of capitalism, their view of the state's role in the economy, and their desire to inject morality into the labor market.

The second section is the most interesting and in many ways the most coherent. All the essays deal explicitly with the reception and use of the ideas of the brilliant British economist, Keynes. It also points to some key differences between Keynes, Keynesians, and Keynesianisms. The first essay in by Richard Toye tells the fascinating tale of "the political and rhetorical uses that Labour politicians and intellectuals have made of Keynes's economic ideas" (p. 154). That Keynes was a Liberal who often treated Labour or trade union leaders with disdain complicated this intellectual relationship. Keynes's ideas of planned deficits and the state's role to kick start the economy during recessions fascinated some Labour figures. However, as Toye points out, Labour's preferred economic policies of physical controls, nationalization, planning, and high taxation meant Keynes was not the most prominent part of Labour thinking. After Keynes's death in 1946 and the defeat of Clement Attlee's government in 1951, Keynesianism became a rhetorical tool. Labour critics frequently evoked Keynes to oppose the rightward drift of the Labour leadership. The middle essay of the section, by Green, examines the occasionally fruitful relationship of Keynesian ideas and Conservative politics. Its originality lies in its counterintuitiveness. For most of its recent history, the Conservative Party and Keynes have been put into distinctly different camps. However, as Green points out, this was not always so. Green is most effective in showing the influence Keynes had on three Conservative individuals, Arthur Steel-Maitland, Harold Macmillan, and J. W. Hills. Macmillan is the best known of the three as he went on to become prime minister from 1957-63 whose economic policies were greatly influenced by Keynes. Green's greater discovery is the thinking of Hill, a notable interwar Conservative Keynesian. Green writes, "Like Keynes, Hills felt that governments had to be guided by different norms to individuals" (p. 195). Green shows how Keynesian demand management evolved from an active instrument in post-1945 governments to a bogeyman of Thatcherite governments. However, as Green shows, even the Thatcherites could not discard Keynes entirely as a rhetorical tool, by resurrecting him somewhat implausibly as an opponent of inflation. The final chapter in the third section, by Eugenio Biagini, is entitled "Keynesian Ideas and the Recasting of Italian Democracy." This piece looks at the transnational impact of ideas on politics. Biagini is interested in Keynes's relative nonreception in Italy. In explaining this phenomenon, Biagini shows how the context in which ideas are received is vital. Keynes had the misfortune of having his ideas tied to the fascist-corporatist critique of free market capitalism. Thus, before 1943, criticizing Keynes "became a cryptic way for Italian liberal antifascist economists to attack Mussolini himself" (p. 224). Once the war was over, the Italian left did not know much of Keynes's work and saw politics as a stark contest between "lib-

eral capitalism or socialist planning" (p. 231). In contrast, the Italian right and center-right governments of 1948-54 pursued proto-Thatcherite policies. One of Italy's postwar presidents was, in the prewar period, a rabidly anti-Keynesian economist! In such contexts, do ideas blossom or die?

The final section of the book is not only the most ambitious but also the most problematic. Stefan Collini's and Barry Supple's essays, in some ways, do not fully reflect the title of the book. There is not enough consideration of "Liberal England" within them even if economic ideas, political leaders, and moral values do make an appearance. Collini's chapter is entitled "Where Did It All Go Wrong? Cultural Critics and 'Modernity' in Inter-war Britain." Collini is interested in how interwar literary and cultural critics shared an interpretation about the emergence of modernity in the seventeenth century in which "the economic" became the main means of defining society in a rational manner. Collini examines the work of such critics as R. H. Tawney, F. R. Leavis, and L. C. Knight to show how all pinpointed the seventeenth century as the time that sensibility was redefined to the realm of irrationality. While Collini's deconstruction of the aforementioned literary critics is interesting, its link to politics is fleeting at best. It might have fit the tone of the book better to have included some discussion of how politicians in the interwar period used literary examples from the seventeenth century to make political points in which "the economic" played a central role. The final chapter, suffers from a related problem. In it, Supple focuses on "the moral implications and consequences of a limited number of important themes in the economic history of modern Britain" (p. 275). While his themes are worthy (including long-run performance of the British economy and structural changes), his chapter has an oddly detached air to it. The economic views of no specific politician, government, or political party are examined at length. Nevertheless, the moral worth of the themes is given considerable evaluation. Morality without individuals turns into an exercise of moral utilitarianism. In addition, a moral matrix needs to be provided with which to compare policy options. For example, how moral was the burden of taxes on southern England versus the impact of industrial decline on northern England? Supple concludes his chapter with sensible advice on the best way to deal with economic change (including help for the most affected and education for retraining), but it fits oddly with the overall collection of essays. While reading this piece, the reviewer longed for the more invigorating prose and opinions of Keynes on the same issues!

Strange Survival of Liberal England is a very good read. Like other works of the new political history, such as the collection of essays by Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *The Conservatives and British Society 1880-1990* (1996), it reveals that political history need not be stodgy or dull. It also reveals how much more ground there is to examine. Politics and political history are too important to be left to debates over personalities and party strategies. Ideas, culture, institutions, identity, and context all must be understood to fully illuminate any political moment. The essays that work best in this collection respect this maxim.

Note

[1]. John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (London: Macmillan, 1936), 383.

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