

Cameralism and Enlightenment: Happiness, Governance and Reform in Transnational Perspective. Edited by Ere Nokkala and Nicholas B. Miller. With the editorial assistance of Anthony J. La Vopa. New York–London: Routledge, 2020. x+325 pp.

In the past decade, political economy scholarship has paid considerable attention to the intellectual contexts that fundamentally affected the formation of modern economic thinking by the period of the High Enlightenment. In this course, new findings on interstate relations, the transmission and dispersion of economic ideas, and practices on sub-national and supra-national levels led to a reappraisal of the old labels of mercantilism, physiocracy, and cameralism. Especially in case of the latter, the renewed interest in revising the old interpretation raised doubts concerning its simplistic elements, in particular its elusive character and its identification with German economic theory. The ongoing debates on cameralist thought revealed two main sources of these pretensions in historiography created partly by Anglo-French writers on political economy and partly by German economic historians, both of whom labeled cameralism primarily as a German variation of mercantilism.

By deconstructing this old vision, according to which cameralist policy was a coherent, static, and systematic phenomenon, the most recent investigations have detected subversive synergies and sought to inspect cameralist thought as a changing and European subject, all the while bringing the problems of normative political language, existing practices, and disciplinary boundaries to the fore. Reflecting on these issues, the past years witnessed the evolution of two conceptualizations. The most recent development is connected to Martin Seppel and Keith Tribe (*Cameralism in Practice: State Administration and Economy in Early Modern Europe*. Woodbridge–Rochester: The Boydell Press, 2017), which concentrates on the pragmatic side of cameralism, characterizing it as a living and European discourse centered around the local university culture and the coexistence of early modern administration and economy. The other alternative, based on a reevaluation of Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi's place in the eighteenth-century world (Ere Nokkala. *From Natural Law to Political Economy: J.H.G. von Justi on State, Commerce and International Order*. Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2019), underlies this collection of studies under discussion, which, as the title indicates, places itself at the borderlands of political economy and Enlightenment studies, while it seeks to shed light on the gains and losses provided by a transnational perspective.

As for its approach, as the introduction promises, this collection of studies chooses the path of the intellectual history of political economy, and it goes further in the direction of explaining cameralism in terms of political theory. In doing so, the editors of the volume, Ere Nokkala (University of Helsinki) and Nicholas B. Miller (University of Lisbon), stress the key words “porosity” and “blending” as explanatory categories for inspecting cameralism not as a rigid entity, but rather, as they suggest, as an “aspirational practice” and a “lens” through which cameralists were connected to the broader intellectual environment of the eighteenth century (p.16). Exploring the interplays between cameralism and the Enlightenment, the volume strives to draw together the processes of economization and politicization under the so-called “economic turn,” discussing both phenomena as starting points for an evolving cameralist agenda across eighteenth-century Europe. As for the other undertakings in the volume, its aim is to dissolve the old categorization in two senses: in reflecting on the generally accepted prejudices and misinterpretations in historiography and in escaping the discussion of cameralism in the conventional framework of the German *Sonderweg* theory (p.3).

The thirteen essays in the volume present the findings of three international workshops organized by the Lichtenberg-Kolleg, The Göttingen Institute for Advanced Study and the Research Network: Cameralism across the World of Enlightenment: Nature, Order, Diversity, Happiness between 2016 and 2017.¹ The studies offer glimpses in three coherent parts into the main intersections where cameralist thought was influenced by other ideas, ideological frameworks, and practices.

The essays in the first part (“Interactions”) discuss the interrelations between natural law and political economy from various angles, explaining their significance in developing early practice-oriented cameralism to a theory-based state science, with a special account of economic actors. From the point of view of historiography, Lars Magnusson’s criticism targets the reduced scope that drew a close association between cameralist thought and the absolute state. As for the changes in cameralism, he goes on to argue that its transformation into an economy- and natural rights-based discipline was much more influenced by the natural jurisprudence of Christian Thomasius than that of Christian Wolff. This general observation is discussed more thoroughly in Hans Erich Bödeker’s essay, in which he pays particular attention to the reconciliation of

1 <https://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/cameralism/544617.html>. Accessed September 26, 2021.

private interest with the common good argumentation. As it is presented in his study, the combination of the two in the writings of influential cameralists, such as Justi, Sonnenfels, and Daniel Voss can be traced back to personal intentions and dispositions to the application of voluntaristic and paternalistic traditions in natural law. Therefore, the transformation of the concept of happiness, bringing the idea of state tutelage to the fore by the late eighteenth century, was a hesitant and non-simultaneous process, rather than a strictly chronological one. (p.71)

The other two essays in this part seek to find new evidence of the connection between cameralist thought and international relations, especially international trade and politics. Examining Justi's publications, both essays go against the old interpretation that equates cameralism with a reduced interest in political power and domestic administration, arguing that in the context of the Europe of the Seven Years War, cameralists faced the challenge of joining the discussion on the "jealousy of trade." With a focus on the expansion of the cameralist vision to international trade, Ere Nokkala's essay focuses on the ambitious but less successful campaign of Friedrich II between 1750s and 1760s, which aimed at implementing extensive reforms to Prussia's domestic and foreign policies. Justi, as one of the promoters of this campaign, had a substantial role in producing publications in which, using the metaphor of "the man of the world," he described Prussia as a new Athens, whose trading nation lived in a monarchy rather than a republic. This argumentation is approached in Koen Stapelbroek's essay from the angle of translations and intercultural exchanges. Through a multi-contextual analysis (Austrian, Prussian, French, Dutch), the study offers insights into the history of translating Justi's anti-Dutch and anti-republican vision on European interstate relations in the 1770s, when, instigated by the rising economic patriotism after the abolition of the Franco-Dutch commercial treaty, the Dutch republic sought to reconfigure its place among European states.

The essays in the second part ("Widening Perspectives") discuss two classical fields of inquiry, both of which received particular attention in Michel Foucault's writings, too. Focusing on the interculturality of cameralism, Nicolas B. Miller's essay describes the interest in populationism as a distinctive characteristic of cameralistic thinking, making cameralists compatible with eighteenth-century comparative science. Emphasizing Justi's uniqueness among his contemporaries, however, Miller's argument, which links his efforts to draw general conclusions from comparisons of European populations to the political-moral school that used to be associated with Montesquieu and the Scottish moralists, would have merited a broader explanation. The study fails to recognize the other possible

sources of the (German) non-moralizing fashion of comparative political analysis, such as statistics, political geography, natural history, etc. Intellectual kinship is also the central question of Richard Hölzl's essay. In the framework of presentism, he approaches his subject from the angle of the environmental history of ideas and explores the intersection of the three areas demarcated by the Foucauldian ideas of *gouvernementalité* and biopolitics, ecological statehood, and cameralist efficiency. By examining the texts of Justi, Pfeiffer, and Sonnenfels in this context, he comes to recognize three basic segments of ecological statehood (the efficient exploitation and conservation of natural resources and the management of natural hazards) as the constituents of cameralist thought.

The essays in the third section ("Dissemination and Local Mediation") center around the multifaceted problem of cultural translation and dissemination. Concentrating on the intellectual implications, on the one hand, they discuss the influence of cameralism on knowledge production in a specific historical context, but on the other hand, they also shed light on the struggles of interpreting cameralist thought in recent scholarship. As for the political stake of adapting the cameralist framework, the essays by Alexandra Ortolja-Baird, Alexandre Mendes Cunha, Adriana Luna-Fabritius, and Danila E. Raskov seem to agree that, despite the cultural diversities, cultural transmission in the Lombard, Portuguese, Spanish, and Russian surfaced either by domesticating the setting or just some elements of the economic and administrative practice (or discourse) of enlightened reformism, including authors such as Bielefeld, Justi, Sonnenfels, Friedrich II, Beccaria, and Melon. Therefore, processing this intellectual package could yield different results and serve various purposes, from implementing a real practice (Lombardy) to gaining political influence in economic administration and reform (Portugal, Spain) and representing a reformist intention in the tsarist court (Russia).

As for dealing with the conceptual difficulties, all four essays follow different strategies. While Ortolja-Baird investigates the intellectual career of Cesare Beccaria in a classical biographical framework, exploring it from Italian political economy to Austrian cameralist reform, Mendes Cunha and Luna-Fabritius discuss the interactions between their translator protagonists (Rodrigo de Souza Coutinho, Francisco Mariano Nipho, etc.) and the multilayered context in which cultural transmission occurred. In contrast, Raskov's essay seeks to position the accumulation of economic knowledge (including the texts by cameralist authors) beginning after the launch of political instructions by Catherine II (Nakaz) in a holistic framework. Deconstructing the functionality usually attributed to

translations, he argues that the presence of the cameralist spirit in eighteenth-century Russia can be explained by the logic of the “elective affinities,” rather than coherent development. From this point of view, Keith Tribe’s fair criticism on how to define and investigate cameralist thought (“What is Cameralism?”) is especially valuable. Even if his pragmatic definition (“taught practice”) seems to contradict the approach followed in this volume. Jonas Gerlings’ contribution to Immanuel Kant’s account of cameral sciences is the odd one out in this part, as it returns to the issue of intellectual kinship. Kant’s affinity with the cameral sciences, misinterpreted by the scholarship, as he argues, cannot be discerned from his philosophical critiques, but from his social status in Königsberg’s elite, his lectures given to state officials, and his engagement in promoting luxury.

The volume ends with Anthony J. La Vopa’s epilogue, which reposit Peter Gay’s account of what the investigation of structures means for scholarship on the intellectual history of the Enlightenment. In his concluding remarks, La Vopa considers the interplay and convergences (or blending) between eighteenth-century political economy and cameralist discourse as a specific compound, characteristic mostly for the formation of cameralist thought. Concerning this general assumption and the volume’s pretensions on this issue, two further implications should be noted, both relating to the perspective of the history of science neglected by this volume. First, the essays in the volume bring in a number of examples of the heterogeneity of cameralist discourse. With some exceptions (Stapelbroek, Raskov), however, the references to other fields of knowledge, such as statistics, physiocracy, natural history, etc. are given without much reflection. Even if the editors’ argument relies on a comprehensive understanding of porosity and blending, this point would have merited a wider perspective for a comparative analysis of the eighteenth-century disciplinary landscape and knowledge production. This maneuver might have been beneficial, as it could have provided further rhetorical and structural evidence not only concerning the complexity of cameralist discourse, but also concerning the question of why blending and porosity actually occurred in adapting and disseminating cameralist thought.

Second, the essays of the volume focus on explaining cameralist thought in the context of political economy. Although this choice is aligned with the volume’s intellectual program, it causes avoidable losses in semantics. The most noticeable example of these simplifications is the inconsistent translation of Justi’s practical cameralism (“Polizeiwissenschaft”) either as the “science of *Policey*” or as the received anachronisms the “science of police” or “police science”

(widely used only from the mid-nineteenth century onwards). Interestingly, both translations ignore the general meaning of “Polizeiwissenschaft,” referred to as a political science (“scientia politica”) primarily in the German-speaking world. In conceptual terms, this remained in use even in second half of the eighteenth century, dating back to the dissolution of the early modern Aristotelian political doctrine. Reflecting on the historical background of intellectual exchange between natural jurisprudence and cameralist thought would have proven especially helpful.

All in all, *Cameralism and Enlightenment* is a rich and valuable collection of essays reflecting on thought-provoking ideas, and it provides an impressive account of the intersections between cameralist thought and the Enlightenment movement. With its choice of subject, the book merits scholarly attention, and it offers several fundamental arguments which will hopefully lead to constructive debates in the field. As for the intellectual position of the volume, it seeks to describe its subject as a general European phenomenon, compatible with other eighteenth-century trends in politics and economy. By challenging some of the pretensions of the scholarship, it places itself in an inconvenient position of navigating and mediating between incommensurable traditions of discourse of intellectual history and political economy studies. In doing so, it provides a decentered view on cameralism, primarily based on the European dispersion and dissemination of Justi’s account. Therefore, the volume’s transnational perspective is rather set on interpreting the implications of Justi’s attempts to expand the cameralist scope, rather than on integrating other less-known representatives of cameralism. The other great concern of the volume is that it centers on avoiding the trap of the German *Sonderweg* theory, which is especially welcome and is articulated most clearly in the essays of third section, the greatest achievement of which is that it provides novel approaches to the Mediterranean, Iberian, and Russian perspectives. It is a great loss, however, that following the wide and integrative approach of the workshop papers, other regional histories, such as those of Scandinavia and East-Central Europe, were not included in this volume.

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