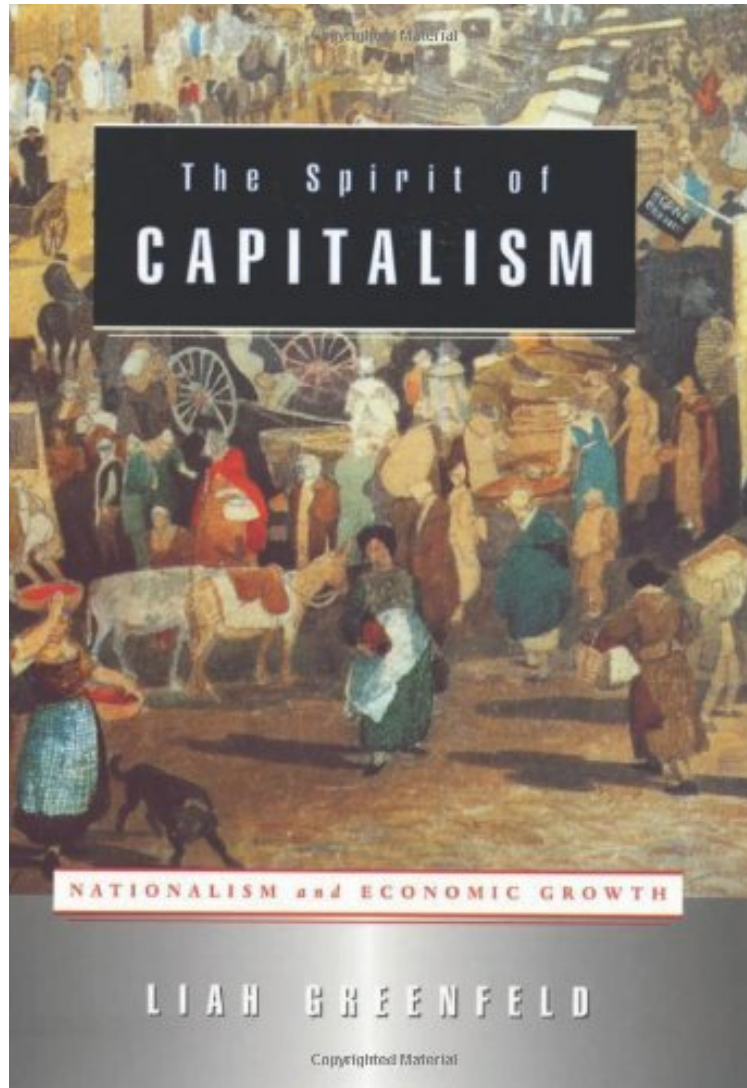


[Download pdf] The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth

The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth

Liah Greenfeld

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Liah Greenfeld : The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. needs a clearer explanation of theory By H. Jang The main argument of the book is very interesting: that nationalism acted as a motivation force that sustained growth and brought the economy to the center of societal focus. Yet I found the book unsatisfactory. The main drawback to me is that the author does not provide a very clear articulation of her theory. First, the mechanism that transforms nationalism into capitalist growth is not clearly laid out. The author seems to equal capitalism to "growth," raising status of businessmen, and a sense of international economic competition, but this equation needs clearer articulation and

explanation. Second, the author does not provide convincing evidence that directly demonstrates the causal effect of nationalism on the development of capitalism. In some cases, she makes claims that by the year XXXX, nationalism was spread in country Y, and that at that time, there was an important theorist who said that economic development could bring glory to the nation. She seem to believe that a juxtaposition of these two pieces is enough to support her argument. But this kind of evidence is not substantive. We need to know concrete examples of government policy, or entrepreneurs biography, that show that nationalist sentiments did behave as a motivational force for the actual participants of the economy. Her discussion of Japan has more evidence of the latter kind, but the Japanese evidence can be interpreted in many ways, such that the idea of "excelling at what you do" or even that "bushido" spirit motivated Japanese business growth. In other words, both "nationalism" and "capitalism" in many cases are lost in her discussion. Last, the reader could not get a clear sense how generalizable her theory is. For example, China developed nationalism a century ago, yet it only embraced a sort of capitalism thirty years ago. It is not very clear from the book that the author's theory can be generalized to this and many other cases (like Russia or India).

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Complementary readings to Greenfeld's book

By Ceacute;sar Gonzaacute;lez Rouco

There are already three good reviews so I will only suggest reading the following books in addition to Greenfeld's peculiar work:

General overviews: "Nationalism and modernism" by Anthony Smith; "The Sociology of Nationalism", by David McCrone; in Spain, "Enciclopedia del Nacionalismo", Andreaacute;s de Blas Guerrero (Director). Books that are nowadays "classic" or almost: "Imagined communities", by Benedict Anderson, "Nations and nationalism", by Ernst Gellner; "Nations and Nationalism since 1780", by Eric Hobsbawn, "The Invention of Tradition", edited by Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger (all of them tend to be critic with nationalism). Focused on a country or countries: Germany, "The nationalization of the masses", by George Mosse; France, "Peasants into Frenchmen" by Eugen Weber; UK, "Britons. Forging the nation 1707-1837" by Linda Colley; Spain, "Mater Dolorosa. La idea de Espana en el siglo XIX" by Joseacute; Alvarez Junco; England, France, Germany, Russia and USA, "Nationalism. Five roads to modernity" by the very Liah Greenfeld; Quebec, Catalonia, Scotland, "Nations against the State" by Michael Keating; Basque country, "El bucle melaacute;ncolico" by Jon Juaristi. Others: "Kindoms and communities in Western Europe 900-1300" by Susan Reynolds; "State and nation in Europe" by Hagen Schulze; "The God of modernity. The development of nationalism in Western Europe", by Josep R. Llobera; "Nations and states. An Enquiry into the origins of nations and the politics and nationalism" by Hugh Seton-Watson. And more and more...

There seems to be an almost infinite variety of approaches to the study of nations and nationalism.

45 of 48 people found the following review helpful. Correcting misconceptions

By A Customer

I have read an advance copy of this book, and feel obliged to comment on the erroneous PUBLISHERS WEEKLY review, found in the editorial reviews section of this page. It is apparent that the author of that review did not actually read the book. The first sentence of the review states as fact a false position, that "beginning in 15th-century northern Europe, unprecedented economic growth spread throughout the world, bringing with it nationalism, technological progress and rationalism in government, religion, and justice, as well as eradication of traditional cultures, environmental damage, imperialism, and wars of unparalleled destructiveness." The book being reviewed argues that it was nationalism which caused the reorientation of the economy towards sustained economic growth. (Nationalism was the motive force behind modern capitalism.) The reviewer is putting the cart before the horse. The opening sentence is a statement of the reviewer's own position, and to contrast it with the central thesis of the book being reviewed (without evidence or counterargument of any kind) was in poor taste. But this is not the worst. The reviewer asserts that the author "eschews both the historian's careful study of primary sources and the economist's insistence on rigorously testable models." The reviewer claims that instead Greenfeld relies on excerpts from secondary sources. This is plainly false. The majority of the book's evidence is primary-source material, all meticulously documented in the notes, which the reviewer apparently did not have time to read. Indeed, like the author's previous work, NATIONALISM: FIVE ROADS TO MODERNITY, this book is interesting and convincing, in part, because of the quantity and detail of empirical evidence it provides.

Third, the reviewer states that, allegedly according to the author, the 6 cases treated (England, Holland, France, Germany, Japan, and the United States) are unrelated. This is also, quite simply, false. The author draws tight connections between these cases. Indeed, she believes that nationalism (and it's refraction in the economic sphere) is fundamentally an idea. This idea began in one place (England) and was exported to the other cases under consideration (minus the Netherlands, where impressive early economic growth was both not sustained and not caused by nationalism), though it took very different forms in each. Given that so much of the story in each case is of the importation of the idea of the nation, it's reception and transformation, and it's impact upon the economic orientations of the social actors in each nation, it is absurd to claim that these cases are unrelated.

Finally, the reviewer makes the bizarre observation that this book is a "criticism of all aspects of the modern world" which will only have appeal to disgruntled readers. Frankly, I cannot imagine how on earth the reviewer got this impression. The book is not a critique of modernity, it does not issue value-judgements, and it most certainly does not condemn modern diet, work habits, and culture, as the reviewer would have us believe.

This is an excellent book. There is none other like it on the subject, both in terms of theoretical scope and detailed historical evidence. It is a captivating story, written in elegant prose. It should be of interest to economists, historians, political scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, and anyone

who wants to understand the world in which we live.

The Spirit of Capitalism answers a fundamental question of economics, a question neither economists nor economic historians have been able to answer: what are the reasons (rather than just the conditions) for sustained economic growth? Taking her title from Max Weber's famous study on the same subject, Liah Greenfeld focuses on the problem of motivation behind the epochal change in behavior, which from the sixteenth century on has reoriented one economy after another from subsistence to profit, transforming the nature of economic activity. A detailed analysis of the development of economic consciousness in England, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Japan, and the United States allows her to argue that the motivation, or "spirit," behind the modern, growth-oriented economy was not the liberation of the "rational economic actor," but rather nationalism. Nationalism committed masses of people to an endless race for national prestige and thus brought into being the phenomenon of economic competitiveness. Nowhere has economic activity been further removed from the rational calculation of costs than in the United States, where the economy has come to be perceived as the end-all of political life and the determinant of all social progress. American "economic civilization" spurs the nation on to ever-greater economic achievement. But it turns Americans into workaholics, unsure of the purpose of their pursuits, and leads American statesmen to exaggerate the weight of economic concerns in foreign policy, often to the detriment of American political influence and the confusion of the rest of the world.

From Publishers Weekly Beginning in 15th-century northern Europe, unprecedented economic growth spread throughout the world, bringing with it nationalism, technological progress and rationalism in government, religion and justice, as well as eradication of traditional cultures, environmental damage, imperialism and wars of unparalleled destructiveness. Ever since, people have sought to explain these circumstances. Greenfeld (Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity) joins them here: her thesis is that unrelated historical accidents engendered nationalism in England, France, Germany, Japan and the United States (and almost in Holland), and that competitive nationalism caused sustained economic growth. To defend her proposal, she eschews both the historian's careful study of primary sources and the economist's insistence on rigorously testable models, claiming that both of these paths have led to error. Instead, she relies upon extended excerpts from secondary sources. Since her examples (the five modernizations and one failed modernization) are unrelated, the book consists of straightforward descriptions of each one rather than abstraction or parallels. This method produces a reader in early modernization with just enough theory to segue between the chapters. The obvious use for this book is for a freshman sociology course on the origins of the modern economy; those looking for groundbreaking analysis will be disappointed. Greenfeld's criticism of all aspects of the modern world, from diet to work habits to culture, will engage only readers who are already disgruntled. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Greenfeld (political science, Boston Univ.) offers a riveting follow-up to Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity (Harvard Univ., 1992). Here she seeks to answer three questions: what caused the emergence of the modern economy, what made the economic sphere so dominant; and what are the reasons for sustained economic growth? Her fundamental proposition is that nationalism is responsible for the reorientation of economic activity toward growth. She strengthens her argument by focusing on the periods of emergence of the modern economy in England, France, Germany, Japan, and the United States. In addition, she adeptly addresses the concerns of critics of her previous work by including an in-depth look at Japanese nationalism and the roles that economics and diplomacy have played in fostering nationalism in her five primary subjects plus the Netherlands and Russia. Although her approach is unorthodox, the quality of her research and the richness of her arguments should be challenging to the various economists, historians, philosophers, and other social scientists who often need to be stimulated by the writing of those outside their disciplines. Highly recommended for both academic and public libraries. Norm Hutcherson, California State Univ., Bakersfield Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. Greenfeld offers a riveting follow-up to Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity. Here she seeks to answer three questions: what caused the emergence of the modern economy, what made the economic sphere so dominant; and what are the reasons for sustained economic growth? Her fundamental proposition is that nationalism is responsible for the reorientation of economic activity toward growth. She strengthens her argument by focusing on the periods of emergence of the modern economy in England, France, Germany, Japan, and the United States. In addition, she adeptly addresses the concerns of critics of her previous work by including an in-depth look at Japanese nationalism and the roles that economics and diplomacy have played in fostering nationalism in her five primary subjects plus the Netherlands and Russia. Although her approach is unorthodox, the quality of her research and the richness of her arguments should be challenging to the various economists, historians, philosophers, and other social scientists who often need to be stimulated by the writing of those outside their disciplines. Highly recommended for both academic and public libraries. (Norm Hutcherson Library Journal 2001-10-15)[An] important new book...Liah Greenfeld argues that patriotism, or nationalism, may have a lot more to do with economic motivation than you think. Most of us have come to accept the economist's view of humanity: On the whole, we are rational actors; we are naturally acquisitive; when political or social barriers are removed, most of us will go off on a determined quest to

make money and achieve ever greater success. [Greenfeld] notes that [the] desire to make more and more money is a recent and localized phenomenon. For most people at most times and in most places, economic growth was not a central or even an important goal. (David Brooks Wall Street Journal 2002-01-24)The Spirit of Capitalism is an immensely refreshing book...[It] deserves to bring about a paradigm shift in the understanding of economic growth. (John Gray Times Literary Supplement 2002-06-07)This is a learned if irreverent and enjoyable book that is rooted in close study of several nations, and Greenfeld's command of diverse historical sources is impressive...Greenfeld certainly presents a scholarly and eloquent case for its importance. Her chirpy and cheeky style is also refreshing in areas dominated by somewhat arid economic historians. (Frank Webster Times Higher Education Supplement 2002-10-18)