

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Contagion and Chaos: Disease, Ecology, and National Security in the Era of Globalization by Andrew T. Price-Smith

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tion”) of utility systems became the norm immediately after World War II. They highlight the factors that contributed to the end of globalization, most notably the growing view that national governments could better ensure oversight of their power networks than could foreign companies, which had primary interests elsewhere. Meanwhile, the book appropriately deals with the recent changes in electricity systems that have contributed to the return of investment by multinational players. Hence, it explains that poorly perceived government regulation spurred a movement beginning in the 1980s to restructure power systems. Deployment of certain free-market principles and the end of restrictive rules on foreign financial participation meant, for example, that during the last two decades, a Scottish company could purchase an American utility, a German firm could hold utility interests in several European countries, and an American business could control power plants in South America. The authors argue that managers of such multinational enterprises would do well to learn from history that forces could push back the pendulum to the other side of the swing—in other words, to nationalization.

Although this book enriches the understanding of how electric-power systems evolved, it differs from the easily read *Electrifying America*, which contains captivating descriptions of culture to explain the social integration of a new energy commodity. *Global Electrification* contains heavy, dry, academic prose that makes for tough slogging at times, especially for those unschooled in economic or business history. The authors devote one long chapter (out of seven) to the analytical tools necessary for reading the rest of the tome, and they provide extensive detail concerning the financing arrangements of electric companies in far-flung parts of the world. This detail highlights the notion that electric-power enterprises constituted complex, multifaceted systems comprising technological, political, and financial elements, all of which evolved together.

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Contagion and Chaos: Disease, Ecology, and National Security in the Era of Globalization. By Andrew T. Price-Smith (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 2009) 281 pp. \$24.00

Although *Contagion and Chaos* is not an advanced quantitative treatment of the subject matter, it bears the marks of a methodology based on variable research, hypothesis testing, and the explication of a formal model. Specifically, Price-Smith outlines a model of how infectious-disease pathogens affect the state, directly as well as indirectly through the intermediary of society.

Price-Smith contends that to understand how (re)emergent patho-

gens act as stressors on the state requires a realist position within political science (the view that international relations are the exclusive result of states interacting “rationally” in an anarchical setting), combined with various aspects of a republican model that emphasizes such nonpolitical challenges as environmental conditions and disease. This approach, he contends, gains further strength through the incorporation of certain elements of political psychology (stigmatization, panic, etc.). To make the argument for such a reorientation, Price-Smith demonstrates how various pandemics, both historical and contemporary (involving typhus, plague, smallpox, cholera, yellow fever, and the Spanish flu), impaired the ability of the state to respond to certain crises. For example, one chapter deals with the extent to which HIV/AIDS influenced Zimbabwe’s governing capacity and national security. Price-Smith also discusses how infectious disease may affect relationships between states, devoting chapters to the regulatory procedures enacted by Britain and other European nation-states during the crises that attended the outbreaks of mad cow disease and SARS and to the changing role of the World Health Organization.

One particularly interesting and intriguing, albeit underdeveloped, dimension of the overall analysis involves the role that chaos/complexity theory may play in understanding the relationships delineated in the model. As Price-Smith notes, aspects of this theory—such as nonlinearity, emergence, feedback loops, tipping points, and punctuated equilibrium—suggest that both biophysical and sociopolitical conditions must be taken into account in any analysis of the relationship between infectious disease and the polity. Although the utility of such a perspective is mentioned throughout the book, Price-Smith might have employed its applications and insights more systematically (especially given the book title) to explicate the countervailing forces of complexity and security. Complexity intimates a lack of certainty and the unanticipated consequences of phenomena like epidemics, whereas security is a socially informed construction based on conventionally positivistic assumptions of prediction and control. By neglecting the problem of how to reconcile these divergent tendencies, Price-Smith misses the opportunity to delve further into the ethics and politics of surveillance and social control, which surely have implications for the actions and capacity of the state.

Price-Smith would probably agree that the complexity/chaos approach has great potential for interdisciplinary research because it requires a tight integration of the social and natural sciences (and not just interdisciplinary social science) to achieve its full explanatory power. Although the promise of the chaos/complexity approach to historical problems has yet to be fulfilled, Price-Smith has made a well-intentioned start with his treatment of the relationship between infectious disease and the state.

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