

of those disciplines. A similar claim might be made for philosophy, which has consistently been expressed in an abstract semantics of being, knowing, judging or ethics as such, and has been allergic to claims that its knowledge claims are or should be historically situated. We might also ask whether the editors were wise to exclude the discipline of history, which has greatly expanded its subject matter, methodology, and geographical range during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. By failing to consider these radical changes in historical scholarship, the editors reduce the term “history” to a vaguely defined black box with no history of its own, and miss the opportunity to consider whether and how historical thinking and research practices in other disciplines co-evolved, or failed to co-evolve, with thought and research practices within the discipline.

Francesca Bray, Barbara Hahn, John Bosco Lourdasamy, and Tiago Saraiva, *Moving Crops and the Scales of History* (Yale University Press, 2023), 352 pp.

Reviewed by
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In recent years, many historians have become interested in the past of agriculture, the environment, and natural resources. Much of this interest has been inspired by discussions about the Anthropocene,

while some of it is anchored in debates about materiality and global history. *Moving Crops and the Scales of History* brings those different research interests together. It is written collectively by four authors representing history, historical anthropology, history of technology, and science and technology studies. The book aims at overcoming some of the perceived shortcomings of global history by focusing on movement and change across time and space.

As its title suggests, *Moving Crops* focuses on a variety of crops, from dates to rice, coffee to yams, cotton to tea. The authors argue that studying these—and other—crops allows historians to understand not only their movements, but also their rootedness in the specificity of place and of the social (more-than-human) life that surrounds and shapes them. This is in line with their effort to take the materiality of things seriously and to incorporate it more fully into global histories of commodities. Relatedly, the authors emphasize the importance of paying close attention not only to human actors but also to the nonhuman world and its “actant” qualities. The underlying idea is to overcome the sense that plants can just be moved and reproduced anywhere by humans who have mastered their biology. Rather, the book insists on plants, animals, and soils as “living beings” that “act on us as we act on them” (p. 19). *Moving Crops* is informed by the notion of ‘cropsapes,’ which ties all of these elements together. Presented as both a tool and a concept, cropsapes is defined as the “*assemblage formed around a crop*: the heterogenous elements or actors brought together in a specific place and time that make and grow a crop.” The authors argue

“[o]ur cropscape assemblages comprise plants, people, weather, markets, ideas, desires, and *histories*” (p. 4, emphasis in the original). In setting themselves apart from more traditional crop histories, the authors want to use cropscares to write integrated accounts of crops that tie the micro to the macro levels, and everyday histories to broader historical situations. They also want to ensure that power relations are not written out of these histories.

The book is divided into six chapters, each of which are dedicated to an axis (or lens) of historical inquiry: times, places, sizes, actants, compositions, and reproductions. Each of the chapters in turn features a number of “riffs” on different crop histories. For example, the first chapter, on times, includes short accounts of dates, tobacco, rice, cocoa, and millet. Taken together, the history of these crops moves across several millennia as well as most regions of the world. The second chapter, on places, includes “riffs” on tulips, wheat, tubers, and tea, and a similarly broad range of historical periods and places. And so on. Some of the “riffs” present diachronic perspectives covering several centuries while others zoom in on a period of a few months. In the introduction, the authors explain that in selecting the different cases they have opted for an approach that brings out “different sets of actors, human and nonhuman, material and institutional, highlighting often unconsidered trends, unexpected oscillations or tensions, and counterintuitive shifts. Playing with cross-cutting scales thus helps subvert established narratives and spotlights theoretical or ideological assumptions woven into different choices of scale and boundary setting” (p. 20). As this statement sug-

gests, the book is not only concerned with developing a new, more complex approach to global history. It is also informed by the effort to speak to contemporary discussions about decolonizing history, incorporating more diverse and lesser heard voices into mainstream accounts, and challenging Western-centric assumptions. Despite its complex agenda, the authors hope that their book “will be fun to read” (p. 22).

It is, in many ways. While the introduction leans rather heavily on the theoretical side and will provide excellent material for ambitious reading groups, the six chapters feature the qualities of a good reader, whether on world, global, crop, environmental, political, economic, or social history. Based on secondary literature, they tell fascinating stories about elephants, marigolds, irrigation practices, and lemons; about Arab poets, Ghanaian entrepreneurs, Belgian farmers, African American sharecroppers, and Soviet agriculturalists; about international wars and backyard gardening, about investing in future-based trading and the inability of peasants to afford fertilizers.

Each of the “riffs” is immensely informative—so much so that many readers will probably regret that they are kept rather short and do not go into more depth. This is a by-product of the experimental approach the book promotes, and probably also a result of the collaborative writing process, which is a notable contrast to the traditional format of the individual-author monograph. However, the particular structure of the book makes continuous and linear reading difficult. There is no one underlying narrative that would emerge from the different chapters—which is in line with the authors’ goal of disrupting

established forms of thinking about crops, movements, and global history. As they emphasize in the epilogue, they believe that their cropscares approach “presents multiple globals and locals, multiple circuits, multiple recuttings or extensions of periodization, surprising coalitions and assemblages, unexpected delineations of paths through space or time” (p. 250).

For all the productive insights these perspectives offer, some readers will feel overwhelmed by the large number of examples with which they are presented. Many would probably prefer less disruption and more orientation. They might also wonder how the cropscares approach, beyond critiquing the past, might offer inspiration for more sustainable forms of agriculture in a world marked by rapid climate change and social inequality. Hence, anyone picking up this imaginative book should do so with an open mind. Whether or not the cropscares approach will become established in global history or other fields of research remains to be seen. What this book does is to present a creative approach to thinking about crops, and a view of the world that starts from the roots.

**Timothy Snyder, *Über Freiheit*.
Aus dem Englischen von Andreas
Wirthensohn (C. H. Beck, 2024), 2.
Aufl. 2025, 410 S.**

Rezensiert von
Helmut Goerlich, Leipzig

Das Buch, dessen englischer Titel nicht „on liberty“, sondern in der Tat „on freedom“ lautet, ist – wie mir scheint – zur rechten Zeit erschienen, nämlich in der Dämmerung des amerikanischen Traums. Diese Dämmerung ist es, die die radikalen Formen des Trumpismus, eine Variante rechtsradikalen Populismus’, erklären kann: In ihr führt das Scheitern im Versuch einer Teilhabe an diesem Traum bei breiten Segmenten auch der weißen Bevölkerung dazu, dass sie in verletztem Stolz und dominant gewordener Scham zu Hass auf das eben im Sinne des amerikanischen Traums erfolgreiche Establishment, zu Neid gegenüber dessen Erfolg und infolge all dessen zu einem Wahlverhalten im Echo darauf führt, dessen Ergebnisse die Welt nun erstaunt zur Kenntnis nimmt[1]; und von wirtschaftswissenschaftlicher Seite etwa nun in Übersetzung Joseph Stiglitz, „Der Weg zur Freiheit“[2], wobei der Originaltitel von Stiglitz ebenfalls von *freedom* spricht[3], wobei klarstellend Snyder auch deutlich macht, dass nach der amerikanischen Verfassung niemand in ein öffentliches Amt gewählt werden kann, der an einen Umsturzversuch („*insurrection or rebellion against the Constitution*“) teilgenommen oder sich als Aufrührer erwiesen hat. Die Verelendung weiter Teile