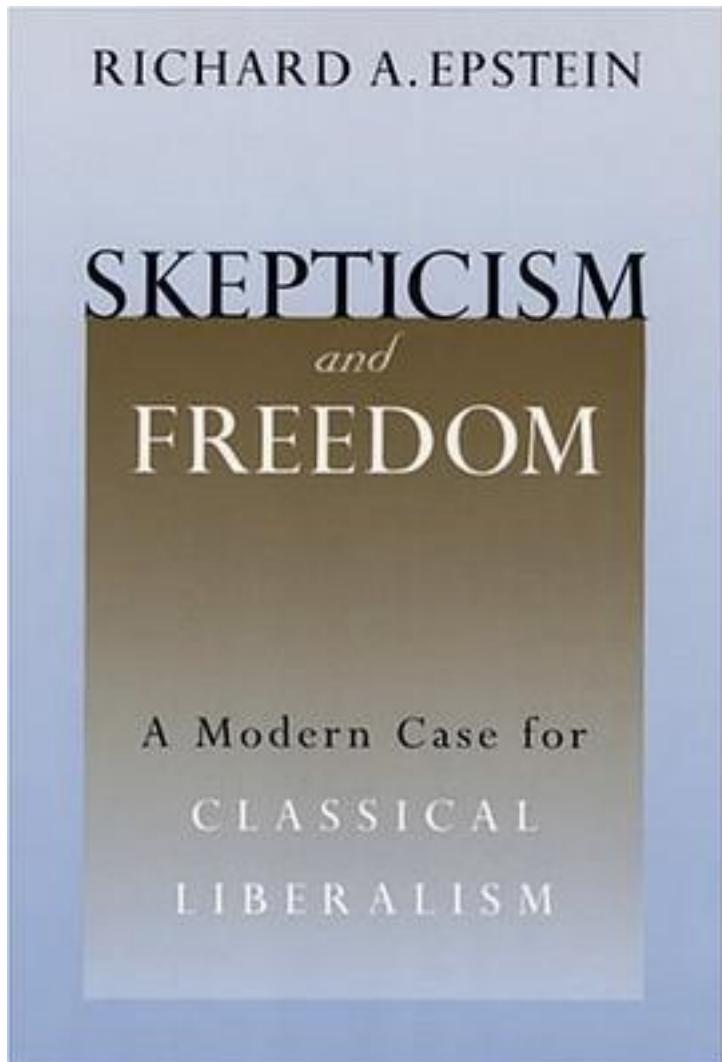


Skepticism and Freedom

RICHARD A. EPSTEIN



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With "Skepticism and Freedom", Richard A. Epstein provides a spirited and systematic defence of classical liberalism against critiques mounted against it over the past 30 years. One of the most distinguished and provocative legal scholars writing today, Epstein here explains his controversial ideas in what should quickly come to be considered one of his cornerstone books. He begins by laying out his own vision of the key principles of classical liberalism: respect for the autonomy of the individual, a strong system of private property rights, the voluntary exchange of labour and possessions, and prohibitions against force or fraud. Nonetheless, he not only recognizes but insists that state coercion is crucial to safeguarding these principles of private ordering and supplying the social infrastructure on which they depend. Within this framework, Epstein then shows why limited government is much to be preferred over the modern interventionist welfare state. Many of the modern attacks on the classical liberal synthesis seek to undermine the moral, conceptual, cognitive and psychological foundations on which the system rests. Epstein rises to the challenge by carefully rebutting each of these objections in turn. For instance, Epstein demonstrates how our inability to judge the preferences of others means we should respect their liberty of choice regarding their own lives. And he points out the flaws in behavioural economic arguments which, overlooking strong evolutionary pressures, claim that individual preferences are unstable and that people are unable to adopt rational means to achieve their own ends. Freedom, Epstein ultimately shows, depends upon a skepticism that rightly shuns making judgements about what is best for individuals, but that also avoids the relativistic trap that all judgements about our political institutions have equal worth. A brilliant defence of classical liberalism, "Skepticism and Freedom" should be seen as an intellectual landmark.

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