

**Karl Mittermaier, Adam Smith,
and Economic Methodology:
A Comment on “The Invisible Hand and Some Thoughts
on the Non-Existent in What We Study”**

By Reinhard Schumacher* and Melissa Vergara-Fernández**

The South African economist Karl Mittermaier is hardly known nowadays. He was born in 1938 and spent most of his academic career at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. He joined its Department of Economics as a lecturer in 1967 but he was not awarded his PhD until 1988.¹ His thesis was titled *The Hand behind the Invisible Hand: Dogmatic and Pragmatic Views on Free Markets and the State of Economic Theory*.² Mittermaier was a founding member of the International Network for Economic Method (INEM). Apparently unable to secure a professorship, he left academia for “a successful career in the pharmaceutical business” (Garzarelli 2019, 6) in the late 1990s.

One of the reasons why Mittermaier is barely known in economics today is his lack of publications during his lifetime. However, he left behind several unpublished works. He would either not submit his manuscripts to journals or would not revise them after submission.³ This idiosyncrasy might explain his lack of publications. As far as we can tell, he only published four articles during his lifetime. Three of them were published in the *South African Journal of Economics*: first, a short comment on Peter Lewin’s definition of inflation (Mittermaier 1978b); second, a biographical sketch of Ludwig Lachmann, his friend and colleague at the University of Witwa-

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¹ Axel Leijonhufvud and Lawrence Boland were his external examiners. He had completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Cape Town, graduating with a Bachelor of Commerce (1959), a B.A. (1961), and a B.A. in Economics (1963).

² His dissertation was not published at the time. Mittermaier apparently intended to publish it, and he even had a book contract with Westview Press. The book is now forthcoming with the University of Bristol Press to be published 2020.

³ The *Cambridge Journal of Economics* published an article by Mittermaier posthumously in 2018 on “Menger’s Aristotelianism,” which Mittermaier had submitted in 1992. However, he did not make the minor revisions the journal asked for and never resubmitted the article. As the editors note, only after Mittermaier’s death did some of his former colleagues see the article through to publication (Mittermaier 2018).