

Jon Elster's *Sour Grapes*
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Eric Schliesser (PhD, Chicago) is professor of Political Science at the University of Amsterdam. He has published widely on early modern philosophy and science, including political economy and political theory, as well as twentieth century economics. In recent years, his research has expanded to include policy relevant work in institutional design. He has edited and co-edited many volumes, including *Sympathy: A History* (Oxford); *Philosophy and Its History: Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy* (Oxford); *The Oxford Handbook to Isaac Newton*. His monograph, *Adam Smith: Systematic Philosopher and Public Thinker* is out with Oxford University Press. He is currently preparing a translation and edition (with Sandrine Berges) of Sophie de Grouchy's *Letters on Sympathy*.

Abstract:

The paper evaluates Jon Elster's *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality* thirty five years after publication. In the first part of the chapter, Elster's work is put in intellectual context. The chapter draws attention to the significance of Elster's framework in changing our understanding and scope of rational choice theory. It argues that the focus on adaptive preferences has opened up important questions for any political theory and policy science confronting the relationship between experts and the agents's theorized. In the second part of the chapter Elster's aesthetics and his critical treatment of Foucault is re-evaluated and found to be less compelling. In particular, Elster's critique of a certain kind of consequence explanation is criticized.