

Adam Smith: The Man, the Mind, and the Troubled Soul

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Nicholas Phillipson: *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010. Pp. xiv, 346. \$32.50.)

Fonna Forman-Barzilai: *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy: Cosmopolitanism and Moral Theory*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xv, 286. \$95.00.)

Ryan Patrick Hanley: *Adam Smith and the Character of Virtue*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xvi, 224. \$85.00.)

There is enormous and unabated interest in Smith's thought partly because he remains—rightly or wrongly—the most important touchstone for the liberal, free-market project. But it is also because his work is so rich and therefore capable of bearing multiple interpretations. In fact, Smith studies is a surprisingly large and competitive field, with its own journal: in 2003 the quantity of secondary literature on Smith could be realistically described as “enough to sink a small boat” (Margaret Schabas, “Adam Smith's Debts to Nature,” in *Oeconomies in the Age of Newton*, ed. De Marchi and Schabas [Duke University Press, 2003], 1) and today it is even larger. Here are three new books to add to that growing literature; all are important additions.

First there is Nicholas Phillipson's *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life*, the long-awaited biography written by a leading scholar of the Enlightenment who understands Smith extremely well. The last important biography of Smith was, of course, Ian Simpson-Ross's *The Life of Adam Smith*, which was a fine and detailed account of Smith's life and works. Why do we need a new biography? For Phillipson, there is more to learn about both the development of Smith's thought and the phenomenon to which he was integral: the Scottish Enlightenment. These Phillipson tells in most engaging and accessible manner, offering fresh insight into Smith's milieu and especially the development of his thought in relation to it.

The major problem besetting any scholar of Smith's life is the elusiveness of the subject. Although Smith was beloved by almost all who knew him, his basic nature was reclusive, solitary, and extremely private. Unlike the

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famously vivacious and sociable Hume, Smith “had a strictly limited taste for city life, salon culture and even, one suspects, the company of his friends” (5). He was teased for being a poor correspondent; worse still, only 193 of the letters he did write have survived while only 129 letters *to* him are still with us. More than half of these belong to the later period of his life (it is assumed that Smith destroyed the letters along with his notes, to preserve his privacy) (136). Phillipson’s evident frustration is shared by all Smith scholars: The “trouble with this act of archival self-concealment [i.e., the bonfire] is that it was an attempt to cap a life that was already badly documented” (4). As a consequence, we know “next to nothing” about the early part of Smith’s life, including his childhood, his student days at Glasgow and Oxford, and the early and formative stages of his career (4). Further, nothing at all is known of his sex life (136). And it is not until 1787—when James Tassie made two medallions of him—that we even have any idea what he looked like (5).

Smith the man may have been evasive, but what of Smith the mind? Although Hanley defends Smith’s intellectual candor (he was “never a deceptive or secretive writer ... merely one who consistently strove to say what he meant” [10]), others have found him less easy to read. Ernest Mossner once described Smith as “one of the most elusive modern authors of distinction that ever a biographer and historian of ideas set himself to cope with” (E. Mossner, *Adam Smith: The Biographical Approach* [University of Glasgow, 1969], 5), while Donald Wagner wrote that Smith’s opinions (on international relations) reminded him of “the man who ... mounted his horse and rode off in opposite directions” (“British Economists and the Empire I,” *Political Science Quarterly* 46, no. 2 [1932]: 274). Still, I see what Hanley is getting at: Smith, while not always crystal clear, was not a deliberate obfuscator where his ideas were concerned.

In any case, it is not a matter of choice that Phillipson has to show us Smith primarily through the prism of his thought and his place in history and that he describes his biography as an “intellectual biography” more than anything else. As an intellectual historian, this is just the sort of biography Phillipson is both inclined and equipped to write anyway, so he is in a perfect position to make the best of it. And he certainly does make the best of it. Apart from Phillipson’s evident skill at telling this kind of story, what makes it such an interesting read is his singular subject; an “eccentric,” “tough-minded” philosopher born into “Scottish society at a remarkable moment in the history of his class and nation” with the intellectual wherewithal “to make the complexities of the modern world intelligible and manageable” (8).

Despite the paucity of biographical data, Phillipson is still able to convey a sense of Smith’s character. We know that he was a “sickly child” (16) born of the “minor gentry” (9) which might explain why he was a champion of that class. His father died before he was born and, perhaps as a result, his mother was extremely indulgent. We are not sure if he “really was snatched by a tinker woman” but this would help explain his unusually close relationship with his mother, who, as Phillipson notes, was the only woman who ever

mattered to him (5–6). As a young man his appearance was said to be “ungracious” and his manner “awkward,” his absentmindedness sometimes giving him “an air of vacancy.” Nonetheless, he was fondly described by one of his early professors as “a very fine boy as any we have” (56).

Phillipson describes a hardworking academic (131–32) and later an assiduous customs commissioner who desisted from innovation (259). A bibliophile known for his humility, tact, and patience, he is remembered, above all, as a benevolent character, with “an extraordinary ability to generate affection and loyalty” (38), particularly in relation to his students, whom he genuinely liked and who obviously returned the sentiment. We also know that his absentmindedness carried over into adulthood (260); there is a famous caricature of Smith by James Kay reproduced in the book that shows him walking through the streets of Edinburgh encased entirely in a bubble. He was not, however, bumbling as is sometimes thought, for he was practical and highly competent. Phillipson also reveals something surprising, puzzling, and sad: despite his fame and the extremely high esteem in which he was held both in Britain and abroad, his death attracted very little attention. “The Edinburgh press all but ignored the event, while in London the press did little more than circulate a short, anonymous anecdotal memoir” that had previously appeared in the *St. James’ Chronicle* (274–75).

Phillipson corrects an important misapprehension about Smith’s relationship to his mentors. It is a commonplace that Francis Hutcheson was a key influence on Smith and Smith’s reference to him as “the never to be forgotten Hutcheson” (268) is ubiquitously quoted in the secondary literature. Yet it is less well known that Smith used exactly the same phrase in relation to Hume, whose influence on Smith was undoubtedly far greater not only than that of Hutcheson but of anyone (244). Smith not only regarded Hume as his closest friend, but as “by far the most illustrious philosopher and historian of the present age” (138).

Hume’s influence (which Hanley and Forman-Barzilai also emphasize) reverberates throughout almost every aspect of Smith’s thought, whereas there is considerable distance between Smith’s and Hutcheson’s opinions. Smith did not share with Hutcheson a belief in the existence of a “moral sense” or in the “essential benevolence” of human beings. Hutcheson’s ideal of the “benevolent, virtuous citizen” did not provide a convincing theory of sociability and his striking “insensitiv[ity] to the changing nature of political power and the problems of government in the modern world” (54–55) would have bemused Smith. Change and the implications of modernity were exactly the kinds of problems that absorbed him, for he was transfixed by the social and economic forces that were transforming the lowlands of Scotland into the economic wonder-region of Europe. He was, by his own account, concerned with “the great society,” the large, prosperous, differentiated world of commerce, not the intimate polity of civically virtuous souls. Hutcheson could not help here whereas Hume, a realist thoroughly in love with progress and modernity, could. Phillipson describes Smith as a

“perfect Humean” (71) partly because he accepted Hume’s argument that morality was acquired. He was also attracted to Hume’s atheism (281) and his antirationalism (66), the latter of which he put to spectacular use in his social and economic theory. Hume’s theories of justice and politics also were more convincing than Hutcheson’s. Whereas Hutcheson’s ideal constitution was designed for redistribution, the eradication of luxury, and the encouragement of civic virtue, Hume favored a minimal state administering security and positive justice and capable of fostering progress, commerce, and material abundance (69). So, clearly, did Smith.

While Phillipson, Hanley, and Forman-Barzilai all see Smith as friendly to commerce, of all the three, Phillipson’s Smith is the most at home in the modern world of commercial prosperity; hence Phillipson’s description of Smith’s work as “a deeply Epicurean enterprise” (280). Forman-Barzilai’s Smith is “troubled” by the effects of commercialism “on the texture of human life” (33), while Hanley’s is a much more worried Smith plagued by nagging doubts about the moral universe he is so famous for defending.

Hanley and Forman-Barzilai seek to address tensions in Smith’s thought that have long puzzled scholars. Both want to figure out the significance of the five sets of revisions Smith made to the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS) between 1759 and 1790, particularly the last set which saw the addition of Part VI and which Smith entitled “Of the Character of Virtue” (hence the title of Hanley’s book).

It is not clear that the tensions addressed by both Hanley and Forman-Barzilai ever can be reconciled, for the simple reason that Smith never seemed to have fully reconciled them himself. For Hanley, Smith’s synthesis of apparently conflicting systems (classical, commercial, and Christian) was never intended as “resolution” anyway. Rather, Smith’s aim was to show that “certain aspects of one system might usefully supplement certain aspects of another.” This seems the right way to read Smith’s complex discourse. Exploring the tensions in Smith’s thought—without necessarily expecting to resolve them—yields many productive reflections on morality and the pros and cons of commercial modernity, a fact that Forman-Barzilai also celebrates in her insightful examination of Smith’s thought.

Forman-Barzilai sees Smith as engaged in a descriptive rather than normative exercise (60), his main concern being social order and coordination rather than morality (87). Hanley argues the opposite, namely, that Smith writes as “a moral philosopher rather than a social scientist” (68). Hanley’s reading is mainly exegetical and sticks closely to the text whereas Forman-Barzilai’s is a more discursive book, interpolating contemporary problems and the views of a disparate range of thinkers, many of whom one might not normally expect to find in a book about Smith. This eclecticism is a function of her healthy skepticism about whether the contextual method can ever afford us complete historical detachment. For Forman-Barzilai, Smith’s value lies in his extraordinary usefulness “for illuminating various tensions in contemporary debate” (25–26). I agree: there is so much in Smith that resonates for us

today. He was not only a brilliant and prescient sociologist but—despite his apparent nerdiness—an acute observer of the inner workings of the human heart.

There are some important commonalities in Hanley's and Forman-Barzilai's respective approaches to Smith's text that bear mentioning here. Both (correctly, I think) accept that the question of the unity of Smith's thought is no longer an issue. Further, both attend almost exclusively to *TMS* and pay particular attention to the implications of Part VI, which was added to the final 1790 edition. Sometimes this leads to unwarranted narrowness; for example, at one point Forman-Barzilai suggests that "Smith's meditations on international conflict are contained in two sections of *TMS*" (204) whereas there is a wealth of relevant material in both the *Wealth of Nations* and the *Lectures on Jurisprudence*. Perhaps the most important commonality is their shared view that Smith is rightly regarded as a defender of commercialism owing to its capacity to maximize opulence and freedom, especially for the lower orders. At the same time, both also fix upon Smith's reservations about commercial modernity. Neither, however, subscribes to the strand of Smithian scholarship that views Smith as having lost faith in commercialism toward the end: they both appreciate that Smith knew what side his—and everyone else's—bread was buttered on.

In his erudite and tightly organized study of Smith's moral system Hanley argues that although Smith was a friend to commerce, he was anxious about its tendency to "induce and exacerbate such psychological ills as restlessness, anxiety, inauthenticity, duplicity, mediocrity, alienation, and indifference to others" (8). According to Hanley, Smith is keen to offset these "vices" via the development of a normative virtue ethics aimed at harmonizing "the longing for individual perfection with the conditions of liberal commercial society" (93). This new ethics is a "morality for modernity" that synthesizes "commercial, classical and Christian virtues" in order to ameliorate the consumerism-induced forces that "have eviscerated the human psyche" (1–2).

This synthetic ethics is explored most fully in Part VI of *TMS*. Here, Hanley argues, Smith articulates "a moral education" whereby the encouragement of distinct virtues is proposed as a remedy to particular commercial vices: "prudence is conceived as a remedy for the vices of restlessness and vanity ... the virtue of magnanimity is ... a remedy for the vices of mediocrity and conformity" while beneficence is intended to ameliorate the "alienation, indifference and inhibition of sympathy" that are the consequences of commercial individualism (93). Hanley posits a three-stage theory whereby the moral agent struggling to evade the corruptions of commercialism ascends from prudence, through magnanimity, to beneficence as he or she matures morally: the beneficent, wise, and virtuous person is the apogee of human perfection. This is an original and bold thesis, though one that Smith never advanced explicitly. Nevertheless, Hanley's interpretation is not necessarily heroic. It certainly explains the discrepant tone and content of Part VI as well as other parts of *TMS*.

Though Hanley shares Forman-Barzilai's and Phillipson's view that Smith's ethics is a product of "social constructions and reciprocal" behavioral adjustments between "actors and spectators," he also wants to insist that Smith's ethics is not just a product of intersubjectivity; his ethics ultimately transcends its constructedness toward a "cultivation of the love of virtue" (99). A key claim is that Smith sought to reclaim the classical insight that virtue might provide "a surer route to happiness than the system of materialist acquisition that so often threatens it" (81). This is controversial in light of Forman-Barzilai's observation that impartial benevolence is "supererogatory" for Smith (20). Hers is the more familiar Smith who famously wrote that "beneficence is less essential to the existence of society than justice" (*TMS* II.ii.3.3). Yet, as Hanley senses, in spite of this—or perhaps because of it—we need to understand why it is that Smith insists that we desire not only to be loved but to be lovable (*TMS* III.2.1), why we so earnestly desire not only to render ourselves "the object of honor and esteem" but to actually *be* honorable and estimable (*TMS* VII.ii.4.9). Society may be able to thrive without virtue, but can individuals?

Still, I wondered if some of the "vices" identified by Hanley (busyness, anxiety, inauthenticity, and restlessness) were really so problematic for Smith. After all, his oeuvre is replete with positivity about commercial busyness and the kind of restlessness and anxiety that motivated it. There are very few negative references to industriousness, which Smith invariably associated with the health and prosperity of a people. He seemed gratified when he wrote that "we are more industrious than our forefathers," and spoke of industriousness as synonymous with "sobriety" (e.g., *WN* V.ii.c.15, V.ii.k.7, II.iii.12), intelligence and success (*WN* II.iv.19), honesty (*Lectures on Jurisprudence* (B), 205, 487) and a "thriving" economy (*WN* II.iii.12). Smith praised those "bustling, spirited, active folks" who were "constantly endeavoring to advance themselves" (*LJ*(B) v.124) while rebuking others who refused to "bestir" themselves in order to gain an "advantage" (*LJ*(A) VI.iii.16, VI.iii.22). Such an attitude to industry and activity was common among Smith's contemporaries. Hume wrote, for example, that "perpetual occupation" affords the mind "new vigour"; "enlarges its powers and faculties; and ... prevents the growth of unnatural ones" (*Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Miller [Liberty Fund, 1987], 270), while Adam Ferguson thought that "the habit of regular industry" is a "great preservative of ... innocence" (*Principles of Moral and Political Science* [Edinburgh, 1792], II. 372; I. 254–55).

On the other hand, it is certainly true that Smith wrote that many have brought upon themselves great unhappiness from not knowing when "to sit still and to be contented" (*TMS* III.3.31). Hanley underlines this point by invoking the well-known story of the poor man's son whom the gods have spitefully "visited with ambition." Admiring from afar "the condition of the rich," he yearns for all their comforts and possessions, imagining that if he managed to attain them he could at last "sit still contentedly, and be quiet." He therefore works himself to the bone in "unrelenting industry,"

sacrificing the chance of genuine happiness to the pursuit of an “idea of a certain artificial and elegant repose” at which he will never “arrive.” It is only in “the last dregs of life, his body wasted with toil and diseases, his mind galled and ruffled by the memory of a thousand injuries and disappointments,” that he realizes that all his “toil and anxiety” has been for nothing more than a few “trinkets of frivolous utility” (*TMS* IV.1.8–9). In fact, the poor man’s son would have been better off had he remained poor, humble and contented with his situation (*TMS* IV.1.10). The moral Hanley takes from this story about the “dangers of an unregulated love of wealth and greatness” (120) is the one that Smith himself seems to offer: “In what constitutes the *real* happiness of human life,” namely, “ease of body and peace of mind,” the poor “are in no respect inferior to those who would seem so much above them” (*TMS* IV.1.10).

But what about the moral Smith *ultimately* draws from the actions of the poor man’s son in the passages retained in Part VI of the final edition? Significantly, in the end, he explicitly endorses the young man’s obsession with wealth and accumulation as both adaptive and natural, at least from the social-system point of view. It turns out that “it is well that nature imposes upon us in this manner” for the belief that acquisitive busyness brings happiness is a deliberate deception orchestrated by the Creator in order to “arous[e] and kee[p] in continual motion the industry of mankind.” Without it there would be no agriculture, no great cities, no arts and sciences, no progress, plenty, or improvement (*TMS* IV.i.10). It is this providential deception that urged our species to progress beyond the age of hunters, to leave behind a dreary and precarious life of bare subsistence for one of exponentially greater material abundance, peace, and order. Smith is not oblivious to the tragic dimensions of his story; he admits that in reflecting upon what he freely grants is a “great disorder in our moral sentiments,” namely, the “admiration of success,” we may nevertheless “admire the wisdom of God even in the weakness and folly of man” (*TMS* IV.iii.31). The implication is that it would be economically disastrous if everyone pursued “real happiness” at the expense of the ersatz happiness of individual wealth-accumulation and conspicuous consumption that, in the long view, makes a society progressive and prosperous.

Obviously, Smith was not himself a victim of this deception, for what he wanted most of all, as Phillipson explains, was to be left alone to think and write. At the same time, he rather regretfully deems it all for the best that most do fall prey to the commercial delusion. It seems likely, as Hanley suggests, that Smith’s portrait of the wise and virtuous man found in the accretions of Part VI is, in part, a kind of “apologia for his own life and the key to his decision to turn from the study of moral philosophy to the study of political economy” (9).

In any case, there seem to me to be three conflicting versions of happiness in Smith. In the tale of the poor man’s son there is, first, the genuine happiness that results from a life of ease and tranquility, and a second, more attainable

form that is a function of power and material acquisition: the “natural joy of prosperity” (*TMS* III.3.9; see also *TMS* I.iii.2.1). The genuine happiness of sitting contented would not bring about the prosperity and order that generates the kind of second-rate happiness that Smith seems to privilege over real happiness in the Part VI passages cited above.

But what of the third version? Even though I have questioned Hanley’s interpretation of the poor man’s son story, I nevertheless think he is right to argue that, especially by the final edition of *TMS*, virtue has become the third, and preferred, “route to happiness” (81). At the bottom of the virtue spectrum we find a character who is more likely to experience happiness than the poor man’s son. This is the “prudent” agent who has managed to live in the commercial world with minimal anxiety. He “lives within his income, is naturally contented with his situation,” and is conservative about embarking on any risky “enterprises” that might threaten his “tranquillity” (*TMS* VI.i.12). For Hanley this portrait of the prudent man is an “attempt to ease the anxieties of commercialism without undermining wealth” (120). Meanwhile, at the top of the virtue spectrum, there is the “wise and virtuous” man whose beneficence “transcends the inefficacious sentimentalism of the pitier and the arrogance and indifference of the magnanimous” (200). Smith clearly had second thoughts about his earlier endorsement of compulsive busyness. The problem is that he fails to reconcile this new conception of happiness with that retained in Part IV and many other parts of his oeuvre. It should also be borne in mind that there is quite a lot in Part VI that speaks of the limits of beneficence, particularly of the universal variety, as Forman-Barzilai points out.

Forman-Barzilai shares Hanley’s view that the “corruptibility of our moral sentiments is a central theme in” *TMS*, inspiring Smith’s “obsessive revisions over thirty-one years” (172). But the real tensions for her lie elsewhere. Whereas Hanley’s book is about the nature of virtue, Forman-Barzilai is focused on the processes and mechanisms of moral judgment. She sees Smith as pioneering “an important and highly original anthropological description of how moral cultures are cultivated and perpetuated over time” (14–15). Morality is a “social practice” that is “intersubjectively produced in shared physical spaces” (137); our moral standards “are disciplined through sympathetic exchange with those around us” so that we are all both “receptacles” and “producers of culture” (174). On this account, Smith is primarily concerned with social order and “metropolitan prosperity” (185) and is motivated by a desire to demonstrate that people can “live together peaceably and productively without coercive forms of moral policing.” In place of coercion, our sentiments “coordinate and unify our lives” (193). But because sympathy can’t save us from our localism, there can be no “universal morality” (162). This is where the tension arises.

For Forman-Barzilai, the issue of where morality comes from and how it operates is intimately connected to Smith’s thought on social distance. She is interested in the impact of physical, affective, and cultural distances

that determine our judgments about and concern for others in an expanding commercial world. Smith is “remarkably parochial” (19); therefore, within the logic of his moral psychology, there is no way for this moral outlook “to transcend itself” (171). If we look at Smith’s text, we find a very clear rejection of the Stoic insistence that it is both possible and necessary to cultivate universal benevolence. Attempting to collapse Hierocles’s concentric circles is a waste of emotional energy because only the “wise and virtuous” Stoic sage is capable of the impartiality necessary for the practice of moral cosmopolitanism. Rather, it is quite natural—indeed inevitable—for us to put ourselves, family, friends, and compatriots before the world at large (*TMS* III.3.9–10). Morality is not universal or transcendent; it is really proximity, familiarity, custom, and “habitual sympathy” that generates intense “affection” (*TMS* I. ii.1.7).

But as Forman-Barzilai sees it, when critics leveled charges of moral conventionalism against Smith after the first edition of *TMS* was published, he became anxious about his “social mirror” theory of conscience. Smith “struggled intensely with the problems of bias and partiality” and sought to “innoculate his theory of sympathy ... against bias and other irregularities in judgement” by developing a conscience like faculty he called the “impartial spectator.” Smith’s anxieties became more acute over time so that by the final edition of 1790 his account had shifted from relying on the socialized conscience for securing social order to establishing “the independence of conscience in quasi-theological perfectionist terms.” In fact, Forman-Barzilai suggests that the “central purpose” of the revisions to *TMS* between 1759 and 1790 was to “assert the independence of conscience” (76). In the end, then, Smith’s particularism didn’t go “all the way down” and our “cultural situatedness” did not render impossible self-critique or an ability to temper our “physical and affective shortsightedness” (176).

According to Forman-Barzilai, Smith became “a troubled particularist” about morals and a “troubled realist about international order” who sincerely wished to “build bridges across spatial divides and achieve international peace” (22). How did he seek to achieve this? Aside from developing the impartial spectator as a mechanism capable of softening our biases against distant strangers, Smith also developed his theory of commercial cosmopolitanism to substitute for a “common superior” to enforce international law and to compensate for the fact that “there was no natural affection against which to balance ‘national prejudice’” (211).

The solution lay in “the civilizing effects of international political economy” whereby “free, self-interested commercial intercourse among nations might mitigate aggression and cultivate peace without goodwill or coercion” (211). Paradoxically, the commercial cosmopolis is an unintended consequence of the parochial and self-regarding behavior of commercial agents. There is no need to ask people to become what they were not because by being what they were—local and self-interested—cosmopolitan ends would be inadvertently brought about anyway. It is unclear, however,

whether this theory was an attempt on Smith's part to soothe his own anxieties or simply something he saw as part of the inevitable trajectory of commerce. According to the logic of Smith's historiography, commerce will—if allowed—expand indefinitely (WN IV.v.b.43, IV.ix.28, II.iii.36). In the system of "perfect liberty" the local prejudices that patrol a country's borders will be unable to frustrate the natural expansion of an international division of labor "uniting ... the most distant parts of the world" and "enabling" separate nations to "relieve one another's wants," to "increase one another's enjoyments," and to encourage "one another's industry" (WN IV.vii.c.80).

Another means for transcending our local and particularistic sentiments is our sense of justice, "an appetite that compensates for our lack of 'feeling' for all 'innocents,' for those who are 'not particularly connected with us.'" By this means Smith gives us a "thin transcultural humanitarian ethic grounded in our human nature to resent injury done to innocents" (236). Smith's turn from "ordinary morality" toward a theory of negative justice—one that relies on the hopefully universally operating harm principle—is posited by Forman-Barzilai as a strand of universalism in his thought (24). Yet the case for the claim that Smith somehow "translated his negative view of justice into a positive conception of international law" (239) is underexplored and I would like to have seen more on this interesting topic.

It is suggested that "Smith never allowed culture to trump justice" (248) and that he resisted cruel practices like "slavery and imperial conquest" (248). Smith certainly disliked both imperialism and slavery but he only actively resisted the former. Contrary to the common perception, Smith never pressed for abolition even though he regarded slavery as both cruel and economically suboptimal (WN I.viii.41, III.ii.9). Slave owners would always resist abolition on the belief that slaves were the "most valuable part of their substance." Further, if such a policy were imposed, "a generall insurrection would ensue" (*LJ(A)*, 116.). Owing to these factors, and because of humankind's natural "love of dominion ... over others," Smith resigns himself to the fact that slavery will never be abolished (*LJ(A)* 114, 117, 185–87). So, there were (admittedly rare) occasions when Smith did allow culture to trump justice.

I think Forman-Barzilai is right in the end to characterize Smith as a "troubled realist" whose elaboration of the socially constructed nature of morality did not preclude the existence of universal features of humanity (253). She recognizes that "Smith never seemed to surrender completely his loftier aspirations for humankind" and that a perfectionism "always dwelled just beneath the surface of his cool descriptions of the world" (253). This is a perception she shares with Hanley and, in different ways, both skillfully capture Smith's distress at the tragedy of virtue under modernity.