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AUTHOR MEETS CRITICS

ERIC SCHLIESSER

University of Amsterdam

I am grateful to the journal and its editors as well as Tamas Demeter for hosting and organizing this author-meets-critics section with such eminent commentators. Where critical, my critics are fair. But I am also pleased that on the whole they have used my book less as target practice and more as a starting point to develop their reflections on Adam Smith's philosophy and its significance. I respond to my critics in alphabetical order.

TAMAS DEMETER

As Demeter notes, I argue that proportions and proportional relations play a central role in Smith's philosophy. In his comments, Demeter focuses on my treatment of Smith's economic methodology, but proportionality also plays a central role in Smith's account of judgments of propriety (2017: Chapter 5). And echoing Fleischacker (1999), I note that this means that the cultivation of good judgment—and the establishment of educational and developmental institutions that enlighten the wider public—are central elements of Smith's political philosophy. I view such connections between Smith's philosophy of science and political philosophy as a benefit from my systemic approach.

I welcome Demeter's suggestion that Smith's reliance on proportions is not unique in eighteenth century Scottish intellectual circles and, in particular, that we can discern a similar use in Black, Cullen, and Hume. In my book I had already noted that Hume relies on proportions in his rules of reasoning and his work on political economy (and demography), so I am not wholly surprised by Demeter's suggestion. But it is a limitation that I give scant attention to Black and Cullen's works, and so Demeter offers a fresh angle. I look forward to reading and learning from Demeter's scholarship on the subject.

In addition, Demeter and I agree (2017: 315) with Smith's first critic, Governor Pownall, that Smith uses the method of analysis and synthesis in the *Wealth of Nations*. In fact, as I note in my book, I learned a lot from Demeter's treatment of the method (Demeter 2016; Montes 2003; Ducheyne 2011). I agree with him that Newton's *Opticks* is the canonical source of this method for eighteenth century sciences.

But I recoil at Demeter's assimilation of Smith's methods to the *Opticks'* experimental approach. For, neither *The Wealth of Nations* nor *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* contain experiments. In this sense they are unlike, say, Hume's *Treatise* (which offers at least some first-personal experiments). Also, despite

the importance of sympathy in Smith's moral and political philosophy (and, as I argue, epistemology), I see no evidence that Smith is much interested in affinities.

Smith's analysis of analogical reasoning is also more complicated than Demeter recognizes. In the *Astronomy*, Smith allows indeed that it is practiced quite a bit in the history of the sciences. And he recognizes that it can be persuasive (although in his treatment of Kepler he also shows that some analogies are too complicated for their own good). But it is central to my interpretation (2017: 269) that post-Newton's *Principia*, Smith thinks that analogies have limited evidential import. A key passage is this one: 'Yet, an analogy of this kind, it would seem, far from a demonstration, could afford, at most, but the shadow of a probability' (*Astronomy* 4.59; EPS 91).¹

I have another reservation about the significance Demeter places on Smith's use of 'body politick' in *Wealth of Nations*. In particular Demeter suggests this is evidence of Smith's vitalistic commitments (Demeter 2015: 504ff). In his contribution to this issue, Wolfe is rather critical of this suggestion; I concur with Wolfe and his arguments. Here I offer another argument for thinking that Smith's use of 'body politick' should not be taken as evidence for vitalism.

Smith first introduces 'body politick' in *Wealth of Nations* in the following passage,

The industry of Great Britain, instead of being accommodated to a great number of small markets, has been principally suited to one great market. Her commerce, instead of running in a great number of small channels, has been taught to run principally in one great channel. But the whole system of her industry and commerce has thereby been rendered less secure; the whole state of her body politick less healthful, than it otherwise would have been. In her present condition, Great Britain resembles one of those unwholesome bodies in which some of the vital parts are overgrown, and which, upon that account, are liable to many dangerous disorders scarce incident to those in which all the parts are more properly proportioned. A small stop in that great blood-vessel, which has been artificially swelled beyond its natural dimensions, and through which an unnatural proportion of the industry and commerce of the country has been forced to circulate, is very likely to bring on [425] the most dangerous disorders upon the whole body politick. The expectation of a rupture with the colonies, accordingly, has struck the people of Great Britain with more terror than they ever felt for a Spanish armada, or a French invasion. (WN 4.7.C.43, 604)

The passage offers a nice illustration of my claim that Smith relies on proportional reasoning throughout WN. Before I get to the context of the passage let me note that there are really three metaphors/tropes at work in the passage. First, we see Smith using hydrostatic/fluid tropes/metaphors for the size and extent of markets;²

second, he treats Britain's whole economy ('industry and commerce') as a system; and third, he treats Britain's political economy in terms of a 'body politick'.

As it happens the first two tropes are Smithian. For, he uses the channel metaphor in a crucial passage in Book 2 of *Wealth of Nations*, where he describes that the legislator should neither encourage exports nor domestic trade, but should leave capital free to find its own markets (WN 2.5.31: 372; see also WN 2.2.30: 293–294 and 4.1.23: 444). I have described Smith's use of 'system' in my book. In WN he tends to reserve the use of 'system' for broader, intellectual edifices (the 'system of commerce' is mercantilism; the 'system of agriculture' is physiocracy; his own approach is the 'liberal system' (WN 4.5.b.39: 538)). But what about his use of 'body politick'?

It is, indeed, notable that in a few connected paragraphs (WN 4.7.C.43–44: 604–6), Smith uses 'body politick' repeatedly. But these passages are also exceptional; for Smith does not use the phrase elsewhere in his published writings. So, what needs explaining is why Smith uses these tropes here.

The immediate textual context for these passages is Smith's analysis of the potential effects of American independence, then (1776) an object of intense political concern. While Smith prefers a peaceful settlement in which Britain and the Americas are turned into an Atlantic, parliamentary empire (see 161–169), the thrust of Smith's argument is that colonial independence will not be bad for trade, but rather will help unwind some bad economic policies which are a consequence of Britain's distorting mercantile ideology.

This is a crucial clue. It is Smith's (imperialist and Mercantile) targets that use the phrase, *body politick*, prominently: for example, we find Petty using the phrase several times in his *Tracts on Ireland*, most notably in his introduction in his Preface to the *Political Survey of Ireland*. Mandeville uses the phrase (mostly, but not always) earnestly in the *Fable of the Bees* (e.g., Vol. 1, 289) and Smith's great, unnamed rival, the Jacobite James Stuart, adopts the image in *An Inquiry Into the Principles of Political Economy* (e.g., 238). That they do so is no surprise because these use the metaphor in order (a) to promote partial economic interests (by Smith's lights) and (b) the idea that experts should offer (b*) tailored/detailed policy advice to politicians that is responsive to economic symptoms.³ While I argue that Smith is no apostle of *laissez faire*, throughout his writings Smith rejects (a–b–b*); the science of the legislator is supposed to prevent the meddling of the crafty politician (see, e.g., my treatment of WN 4.2.39: 468, on 209).

A more natural reading of WN 4.7.C.43ff. presents itself: Smith is critical of competing economic systems/ideologies and he partially deploys their own leading metaphors against them in order to show they not only are bad economics, but also generate bad politics. For, he is claiming that when/if one favors one economic interests over all the others, then when that interest is threatened or undermined, the public will be alarmed (in a sense correctly) and so become rather unstable, even terrified. Even on their own terms, mercantile policies create

political fragility. These are, thus, an example of a ‘wrong system,’ which I argue is an important category for Smith; these are systems that generate inductive risk (Douglas 2001).

Finally, let me close with a final disagreement. Demeter argues that the natural price is ‘a real economic phenomenon and *not* a purely fictional or theoretical construct’. While this almost captures the spirit of my position, it does not represent it accurately: I claim (292) that under certain rare conditions a natural price *could* correspond to a real economic phenomenon. So, on my interpretation the natural price is not only a theoretical construct. Demeter ignores my arguments for thinking that for Smith in practice the natural price is very much a counterfactual. For, the natural price is the circumstance in which there are (to use anachronistic language) no obstacles to resource mobility. But these circumstances rarely obtain in a world of guilds, trade barriers, and Mercantile/Physiocratic policies. To summarize the argument of ch. 12: it’s only in a political economy in which Smith’s policy prescriptions are adopted and followed where natural prices will occur regularly.

LÁSZLÓ KONTLER

Kontler calls attention to a number of subtexts and threads in my book and kindly asks me to take a step back and reflect on some themes in recent scholarship that are of oblique interest in the book. Addressing any of these in a thorough fashion would exceed my total word limit so what follows is a bit truncated and focused on social trust.

Trust is not in my index and mentioned only once (206); it’s used in a quote by Smith, ‘the law ought always to trust people with the care of their own interest, as in their local situations they must generally be able to judge better of it than the legislator can do,’ (WN 4.5.b. 16, 531.) The underlying point is epistemic and anti-paternalist. The epistemic point has been emphasized by Hayek and his followers. So, I leave it aside here. The sentence may be thought to have little to do with ‘social trust,’ the topic of interest to Kontler’. But one of Smith’s points here is that a lot of paternalist regulation is an *expression* of the government’s and society’s mistrust of the capacities and judgments of ordinary people (on this theme see Levy 2012; Fleischacker 1999); conversely, Smith’s position encourages the authorities to trust the capacities and judgments of ordinary people and, thereby generate conditions for the development of more social trust.

Smith’s position is grounded in his account of liberty. I argue (216–220) that this should not be confused with the liberty to contract (the ‘negative’ liberty of the moderns). I show that for Smith liberty means exercising one’s judgment

to make meaningful choices, which may include the freedom to contract (but is certainly not exhausted by it).

This freedom to exercise one's judgment presupposes a form of self-ownership and the kind of security that is a consequence of living under the impartial rule of law (220). As Kontler recognizes I understand Smith's defense of the rule of law and other commerce-friendly institutions in terms of reasonable expectations of people about the security of contracts (179). Smith suggests that generally such reasonable expectations generate social trust (including, as Kontler suggests, in the very institutions that facilitate them) and are, in turn the expression of social trust.

Dispositionally and psychologically this view of social trust is embedded in Smith's account of the moral/social sentiments: these are 'cultivated feeling[s] that [in their content always] include reliable expectations about responses by others' (26). I am pleased that Kontler noticed the connection and highlighted it. I just note that not all reliable expectations are reasonable: that is just to say that such social trust need not always be beneficial when it stabilizes a faction or worse.

While much more could be said about social trust, Smith's position here presupposes the continuing success of public enlightenment: for Smith to exercise judgment and act virtuously are demanding skills that presuppose not just good background institutions and economic resources, but also knowledge (ch. 9). As noted above, I argue that his views on education are central to his political philosophy. Unlike those that think Enlightenment requires a frontal attack on religion, Smith prefers to ensure freedom of religion (ch. 14), which trusts individuals to exercise their own judgment about matters that concern them most.

CRAIG SMITH

In his generous and incisive piece, Craig Smith articulates my position on a range of issues more clearly and more succinctly than I managed to do in my book and simultaneously conveys their significance. So my response is brief.

He correctly notes that I deviate from the recently popular, Adam Smith as eclectic reading. But he is too kind to mention that once I had embraced such an interpretation, too, together with Montes in our joint introduction to *Montes & Schliesser 2006*. While it remains possible that Adam Smith was influenced by many different kinds of traditions (so in that sense he is eclectic), I agree with Craig Smith that this approach is incompatible with my focus on system(s) in Adam Smith's thought.

Be that as it may, I sense in Craig Smith a hesitation about my claim that Adam Smith is not a 'moral' (nor 'epistemic') empiricist. I agree with him that Adam Smith embraces empirical methods and that these lead him to assert that there are,

as an ‘empirical fact,’ what I call ‘proto-passions,’ which on my reading of Smith have some innate ‘content’.⁴ So, one can embrace empirical methods without being an empiricist (see Biener & Schliesser 2014; Schliesser 2018). While much of my best evidence for my argument that Smith is no empiricist indeed comes from *External Senses*, which is no surprise because that essay directly engages with Berkeley and seems to target Hume, I also rely on *Astronomy* (2.7, EPS 41) and *TMS* (6.3.23, 247). I do not mean to suggest that I consider my argument conclusive. But I hope not just to have started a debate worth having, but also to have made scholars, who rightly discern many Humean themes in Smith, more cautious in attributing empiricism to Smith.

SPIROS TEGOS

As noted in my book Tegos is an important influence on my understanding of Smith. But I forgot to acknowledge that Tegos commented on an earlier draft of the book. I am pleased to have an opportunity to set the record straight herewith and have my gratitude for his helpful comments asserted in print.

In a series of important papers, Tegos has approached Smith’s political philosophy through Smith’s complex analysis of social mores and norms (what he calls ‘manners’). It is no surprise, then, that Tegos is able to bring Smith into useful comparisons with Montesquieu and Millar. His comment extends his analysis with originality.⁵

Even so, I was surprised to see Tegos attribute to me the idea that Smith is a ‘conservative’ (referencing 140). It’s true that there I distinguish Smith from some of his more radical admirers (Paine and De Grouchy). And I understand that given that I argue (while reflecting on *TMS* 1.3.3.1, 61) that Smith thinks some social hierarchy has social utility even in his own system of natural liberty and that given that I emphasize that the very cognitive mechanisms which facilitate such hierarchy also cause the corruption of the moral sentiments, that Tegos ascribes to me a ‘conservative’ interpretation of Smith. While on my reading there are indeed Burkean elements in Smith (including Smith’s alertness to the stabilizing influence and political significance of social orders and ranks), Smith is a genuine social reformer—one who embraces gradualism on humanitarian grounds. In particular, Smith articulates and promotes ambitious long-term social projects that ought to guide such reform. The intended outcome of these reforms is the destruction of the many forms of social hierarchy present in Smith’s time (and ours). Unlike conservatives, Smith does not defend tradition nor existing hierarchy.

I also do not fully understand Tegos’s opposition between Millar and Smith. But, perhaps, by making clear where I disagree with Tegos this, too, will become clear. For, while I agree with Tegos that for Smith all societies have some

subordination, I reject the thought that (for Smith) this always entails servility. I see Smith as a critic of servility and dependency. So, as I note (33, 38 & 178) the argument in favour of commercial society against shepherding societies and feudalism is, in part, that it abolishes ‘fawning’ (WN 1.2.1, 25) and ‘servile dependency’ (WN 3.4.4, 178; Herzog 2013). In so far as capitalism still generates or reinforces such dependencies, Smith’s project remains unfinished.

Part of the problem here is that I wish Tegos had been more explicit on the relevant details of his reading of TMS 1.3.2–3. On my reading, Tegos does not pay sufficient attention to the distinction *between* the ‘middling’ and ‘inferior’ ranks (which Tegos seems to run together).

For, according to Smith ‘the poor man, on the contrary, is ashamed of his poverty. . . . goes out and comes in unheeded, and when in the midst of a crowd is in the same obscurity as if shut up in his own hovel’ (TMS 1.3.2.1, 51). In context, Smith does not blame the poor. But he does recognize that corrupt social norms creates temptations to ‘frequently abandon the paths of virtue’ (TMS 1.3.3.8, 64). Smith clearly thinks that very hierarchical societies are not good for the poor, and, in particular, that they are bad for their psychic health. It is no surprise, then, that in the famous set-piece passage of TMS (4.1.8, 181ff.) – with the deception of the imagination and the invisible hand – it is ‘the poor man’s son,’ who misperceives the true condition of the rich. I mention the poor man’s son in particular because from ambition he is ‘obsequious to those whom he despises’ (TMS 4.1.8, 181ff.)

So, Tegos is correct to diagnose the existence of ‘a certain amount of servility’ among the non-aristocratic ambitious. But Smith restricts this servility to the ambitious poor. The problem here is not their ambition as such, but rather that on Smith’s understanding of the effects of social hierarchy, the ambitions of the very poor are both self-defeating in a certain sense (even if they acquire riches they do not acquire true happiness) and fueled by prior social deformation which leave them miserable.

By contrast, if I am not mistaken, Smith thinks that even in hierarchical societies the middling ranks start out life with more economic and psychic advantages which allow them happier and virtuous avenues. If that’s right, then Smith is probably closer to Millar than Tegos allows; I am not confident about this conclusion and look forward to learning from Tegos’s research.

CAROLA FREIIN VON VILLIEZ

Von Villiez is surely right that for Smith greater intellectual skill entails greater responsibility (along the many dimensions where such skill matters). She is right that this is an oversight on my part because it coheres with what I claim about Smith. I think I come close to saying this in ch. 9, where I focus on the ‘excellent-in-virtue-of-character’ because (i) I emphasize that such virtue is a skill (cf. 60),

and (ii) that the many such excellent-in-virtue-of-characters are models for others to be emulated. In addition, in reflecting on the infanticide example, I write ‘even humane philosophers, who ought to know better...’ (134) There are intellectual duties for Smith and, as she rightly notes, these duties evolve (and become more stringent) in the development of understanding.⁶ Yet, somehow the exact point of greater duty eluded me and I am grateful to Von Villiez for making it explicit.⁷

It is worth reflecting on why I missed this point. On my reading of Smith, it is the duty of a philosopher to promote ideas and social institutions that (perhaps indirectly) undermine the support for fanaticism and avoid the risk of promoting it. For example, Smith’s robust defense of freedom of religion and his advocacy of commercial society are both conceived, in part, as ways of undermining the social conditions and practices that lead to support for various kinds of faction, fanaticism, and hierarchy. His concern with what I call ‘responsible speech’ is also related to this. That is, for Smith, a theory should not be evaluated only with regard to the truth, but also to the consequences of taking it as true (or using it in policy, etc.).

But in the book I do not suggest it is duty of the public intellectual to take on fanatics or public prejudices as such. Rather, on my reading a philosopher needs to accommodate herself to public prejudices (TMS 6.2.2.16, 233). I highlight the grounds of his caution (bordering on cowardice) in his unwillingness to help Hume get a university position and to publish Hume’s *Dialogues*. Rather, Smith tends to leave the confrontation with public prejudice to reformist politicians who, if they are courageous and wise, can thereby become statesmen (see especially TMS 6.2.2.14, 232).

I missed some of the greater duties of the cognitive elite because I doubt that Smith demands greater *public* courage from them. But Von Villiez’s point also applies to philosophical systems, and this I missed.

Von Villiez suggest another correction; she writes that, Smith’s intention here seems to transcend the point that ‘not [...] everybody has a fully determinate “idea of exact propriety and perfection” (Schliesser 60), in that *no-one* can ever grasp this idea in its *full determination*’. In context she seems to imply that I would disagree with the emphasized part. I understand what caused her to think that; I wrote ‘ultimately only a few attain a genuinely precise idea of property/perfection’ (60). This can be taken to imply that some can gasp an idea with full determination—but I thought it was clear in context that mere mortals could not achieve this and that lovers of virtue are left ‘*emulating*’ the ‘archetype of perfection’ (60). But my language of precision was (ahh) imprecise and confusing, and I am happy to accept Von Villiez’s emendation.

Other than that we seem in major agreement (except that I avoid her Kantian terminology). But it is useful to mention the minor disagreements that remain: first, I would not compare what she calls the ‘natural standard’ – and which (in chs. 4 and 7) I call a relative ‘thin common universal morality’ – with Rousseau’s

pitié, but that's because I have argued that this thin morality is grounded, for Smith, in the natural sentiments (and these should not be conflated with *pitié*). Second, Von Villiez seems to imply that what she calls the natural standard is routinely achieved; but while it is indeed achievable to all in theory, I argue that the suggestion that we do achieve it commonly is a rhetorical construct of Smith (93–95). In fact, this may well be part of Smith's moral education the promotion of which he may have taken to be his 'surplus intellectual' duty.

CHARLES WOLFE

I am pleased that Charles Wolfe is one of my commentators. Not just because he offers a characteristically generous reading of my work, but also because I can correct an omission. In ch. 13, I argue that Smith is in several respects an anti-mathematicist. I argue my case, in part, by comparing Smith to Mandeville in various ways. I should have alerted the reader to the fact that while Wolfe and I were colleagues in Ghent we did a reading group on the relevant passages in Mandeville and also discussed eighteenth century anti-mathematicism together at length. In particular, Wolfe had called my attention to the significance of Diderot (whom I mention on 314 note 1). I should have called attention to Wolfe's treatment of Diderot's *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature*, §IV, (Wolfe 2014 & 2017).

As my remarks on Demeter's essay suggest, I fully agree with Wolfe and I warmly recommend his piece.⁸ My one quibble is that he misrepresents me in suggesting that I understand sympathy as an emergent property. As evidence for this claim, he quotes me as saying that sympathy 'can be a means of generating linkages where previously connections were latent' (Schliesser 2013: 4) In context I do not mean to suggest that sympathy is an emergent quality. Rather I am describing cases where in the history of philosophy, sympathy is invoked (in explanations) as an 'active principle'. In such cases sympathy is a cause that brings elements within a unity together. Sometimes this can generate an emergent property, but all I meant to say there is that such a sympathetic process is compatible with the establishment of relations between relata whose connection was either not manifest nor established.⁹

Tegos starts his response with the comment that 'from a methodological point of view, Schliesser's book offers an original synthesis of textual, contextual, historical and analytic approach that goes off the standard interdisciplinary path'. I think he means it as a compliment, but such hybridity is, of course, dangerous because it can seem—and often is—undisciplined. In the book I defend my methodological choices. One purpose of these choices is worth reiterating here: the point of my book is not just historical accuracy or contribution to scholarship. I also wish to make Smith available to readers concerned with the contemporary

crisis of liberalism and who are looking to reflect on exemplars in order to help them contribute to the re-animation and reconstruction of a liberal project worth having. I do not wish to suggest only such readers can decide if I succeeded, but if they find something of value in the book then I have succeeded.

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NOTES

- ¹ EPS = *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*; TMS = *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*; WN = *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*.
- ² This partially reflects the influence of Hume (Schabas 2001).
- ³ I do not mean to suggest these should be classified as mercantilists. But each is a notable target of Smith.
- ⁴ I ignore what Smith's empirical observations and methods would have been that could have warranted his conclusions about hidden mental structure.
- ⁵ Tegos draws on Smith's *Lectures on Jurisprudence* to do so. For my purposes in presenting and evaluating the *public* Smith, I left them aside.
- ⁶ In context, Smith is critical of Plato and Aristotle. These two did not just fail to protest their societies' inhumanity when it comes to infanticide, but they also actively proposed infanticide (Plato *Republic* 459–461; Aristotle, *Politics* VII 1335bff.) This seems to be the natural reading of both. But for an alternative interpretation of Plato and Aristotle, see Viljoen (1959).
- ⁷ On 227 note 1, I quote Hutcheson at length in order to show that anybody can be a moral hero. But the very same passage from Hutcheson also entails that greater intellectual skill entails greater responsibility. So, Smith is closer to his teacher than I recognized.
- ⁸ In passing he mentions Cabanis's vital-materialist Spinozism. It would be interesting to hear how Wolfe reads Cabanis's sometime correspondent, and translator of Smith, Sophie de Grouchy.
- ⁹ If one thinks of relations as emergent properties out of the relata and thinks that all relations are such emergent properties, then my quibble with Wolfe is merely verbal.