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Liberalism, Civic Humanism, and the Case of Adam Smith

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In this article, I examine critically Donald Winch's interpretation of the politics of Adam Smith. I explain how Winch wrests Smith's political thought out of the larger vision of commercial society that is found in his moral, political, and economic writings, and how Winch misreads Smith's understanding of particular political problems such as the dehumanized workforce and the standing army. I also show how Winch's civic humanist reading of Smith's political thought fails to appreciate Smith's liberal conceptualizations of corruption and public-mindedness in a modern commercial society. Finally, I suggest that our failure to understand the politics of Adam Smith does not lie in our liberal interpretation of his work, as Winch claims, but in our understanding of what constitutes liberal political discourse.

The concepts of virtue and corruption have played a major role in the history of political thought since the ancient Greeks. Traditionally, histories of political thought have associated the decline of these concepts with the rise of liberalism in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, and Marxism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Cropsey, 1957; Cumming, 1969; Sabine, 1961; Wolin, 1960). A growing interest in the economic forces underlying political change is seen to displace gradually classical attempts to view politics through moral categories, and to give rise to a modern mechanistic view of the political order.

Over the past 15 years, a number of important attempts have been made to reinterpret seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century thought through a reading of the republican or civic humanist tradition (Bailyn, 1967; Kramnick, 1968; Pocock, 1973, 1975a, b; Robbins, 1959; Wood, 1972). Focusing upon the central role played by the concepts of virtue and corruption in the republican tradition, these studies have led to a striking revisionist understanding of an evolving Anglo-American tradition of political discourse. Among the most prominent of the revisionist interpretations has been the work of J. G. A. Pocock.

According to Pocock, there emerged in post-1688 England a purely secular form of social criticism that drew heavily upon the civic humanist tradition of renaissance Florence in order to understand the impact of an expanding commercial economy upon English political life. Rejecting or minimizing the role of the individual in the marketplace, or of the merchant class in the economy, this civic humanism was based upon a perception of changes in the role of the individual as citizen, and in the autonomous citizen's ability to perform certain political and military duties. The function of property in the civic humanist paradigm was to insure the autonomy of each individual citizen in the performance of one's duties. Property, particularly landed or real property, was perceived to be the foundation upon which an individual's civic personality and civic virtue rested.

Pocock's interpretation has culminated in a serious reevaluation of the importance of liberal modes of thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For Pocock, civic humanist writers were "the first intellectuals on record to express an entirely secular awareness of social and economic changes going on in their society, and to say specifically that these changes affected both their values and their modes of perceiving reality" (1975b, p. 461). Civic humanists did not investigate the dynamics of the marketplace nor did they accept the assumptions of "possessive individualism." They analyzed the modes of property which left men unduly dependent upon others from the property-personality-civic autonomy matrix. To the degree to which emerging social types such as the monied interest could not conform to these

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criteria, civic humanists denounced them as undermining or corrupting the social and economic foundations upon which the polity rested. To the degree to which these social types could conform to these criteria, civic humanists championed them as forces promoting virtue and stabilizing the political order.[1]

In *Adam Smith's Politics,* Donald Winch has written "an essay in historical revision" that draws heavily upon the civic humanist interpretation of eighteenth-century thought. By placing Smith in the context of civic humanism, Winch seeks to show how Smith's political views were affected by attitudes that were not liberal-capitalist in orientation and to explain why Smith's politics were not simply an episode "that occurred some way along a road which runs from Locke to Marx" (1978, p. 180). Far from representing the cutting edge of a liberal vision of the world, the politics of Adam Smith were part of the evolving tradition of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century civic humanism.

In this article I examine critically the Winch interpretation of Adam Smith's political thought. I argue that Winch's civic humanist reading of Adam Smith's politics has led to a serious misunderstanding of Smith's thought. Winch wrests Smith's political thought out of the larger vision of commercial society that is found in his moral, political, and economic writings. As a result, Winch fails to appreciate the degree to which Smith's understanding of particular political problems, such as a dehumanized workforce or the standing army, exists not only outside the logic of civic humanist thought, but in direct opposition to it. I also explain why Winch's analysis fails to appreciate Smith's "liberal" conceptualizations of the problem of corruption and public-mindedness in a modern commercial society and how these, too, stand outside the orbit of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century civic humanism. Smith's vision of commercial society, his understanding of what holds it together, and his insight into what threatens to undermine it are a far cry from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century civic humanist thought. Our failure to understand the politics of Adam Smith does not lie, as Winch claims, in our liberal interpretation of his work, but in our understanding of what constitutes liberal political discourse.

[1]Kramnick (1982) recently has suggested that the civic humanist interpretation has gone too far in its attempt to read Lockean liberalism out of eighteenth-century Anglo-American political thought. Macpherson (1962), Meek (1967, 1977), and Hirschman (1977) also provide alternative interpretations of the development of political and economic ideas in eighteenth-century Anglo-American political thought.

Winch's Smith

At the heart of Winch's reading of Adam Smith's politics lies an attempt to recover a lost political dimension to Smith's thought. According to Winch (1978, p. 26), "Smith employs a consistent method or style of political analysis in his writings and lectures which cannot readily be encompassed within the categories of the liberal capitalist perspective." In order to understand this lost dimension "it is necessary to bear in mind that he is frequently employing a well-established public language for discussing such matters—a language, the resonances of which were already well known to the educated members of his immediate audience" (1978, p. 5). Surprisingly, Winch's explanation of exactly what this "well-established public language" encompasses is rather vague. Constant references to the work of J. G. A. Pocock and his ongoing attempt to read Smithian political ideas in light of the property-personality equation found in the civic humanist tradition leave little doubt that the "public language" Winch is referring to is civic humanism. Indeed, chapters 4-7 demonstrate a systematic attempt to read Smith's analysis of particular political questions of the day, such as the question of the relationship between commerce and liberty, the problem of a dehumanized workforce, the public debt issue, and the standing-army controversy, in terms of the ideas of contemporary civic humanist writers.

The problem with Winch's civic humanist reading of Smith's politics is that it ultimately fails to come to terms with the broader world view that structures Smith's analysis of particular political problems of the day. This world view does not work out of the assumptions or the logic of the traditional civic humanist language of discourse, nor does it reflect a suspicious outlook toward the modern commercial order as is found in the work of most civic humanists. Indeed, the Smithian world view both accepts and champions the modern commercial order. The difference between Smith's perception of commercial capitalism and that found in civic humanism can be best appreciated by looking briefly at two aspects of Smith's thought: his analysis of the rise of commercial societies in Book III of *The Wealth of Nations,* and his use of the "four-stage theory" in Book IV.

Of Commerce and Liberty

There is little doubt that Smith draws heavily upon the historical arguments developed by David

Hume in the essays "Of Commerce" and "Of Refinement in the Arts" as well as in *The History of England.* Smith himself credits Hume with being the first modern writer to understand the relationship between commerce and liberty (1965, p. 385). For Winch, the Humean connection puts Smith's thought solidly in the civic humanist tradition because "Hume's language and mode of conducting his argument . . . can also be described in terms of the civic humanist perspective" (1978, p. 74).

There are a number of problems with this interpretation. First, it fails to appreciate the larger political impetus behind Hume's political and philosophical writings. Hume did not develop his historical arguments about the relationship between commerce and liberty in the modern world in order to criticize modern commercial society from within a civic humanist perspective. As Forbes (1975) has shown, he developed it to move contemporary thinking about politics beyond the narrow court-country debate within which civic humanist arguments thrived. Ultimately, Hume sought to explain why commerce tended to promote, rather than to undercut, liberty in the modern world.

A second problem with this interpretation is that it fails to appreciate how antithetical the notion of liberty found in Hume's historical writings and in Smith's economic writings is to the civic humanist mind. Both Hume and Smith agree with their civic humanist contemporaries that feudalism had undercut liberty by fostering conditions of economic and social dependency. But the liberty that Hume and Smith believe accompany the "order and good government" introduced by commerce and manufactures is not that found in civic humanism. For the civic humanist, the idea of liberty is integrally connected to the idea of the independent citizen who is capable of engaging in politics and of acting in the public interest. Liberty thus is conceived in a highly positive manner along the lines of classical Greek thought. In contrast, the notion of liberty discussed by Hume and Smith is a mean, almost entirely negative liberty. Commerce and manufacture do not create the economic conditions that might enable citizens to engage in political activity. They only free individuals from the dependency found in the feudal system. Thus although the marketplace frees individuals from immediate personal servitude, it does not make them into autonomous, independent citizens.

The most disturbing problem with this interpretation is its failure to understand the role that this anti-civic humanist line of argument played in the larger line of argument developed in *The Wealth of Nations.* Smith's analysis of the relationship between commerce and liberty is not developed primarily to move beyond civic humanist thought, but to explain historically why, despite earlier successes, the mercantile system posed a serious threat to future economic growth. To appreciate the political import of the historical arguments developed by Smith in Book III of *The Wealth of Nations,* they must be read in light of his larger economic arguments and his critique of the mercantile system.

Book I of *The Wealth of Nations* centers around a discussion of the role played by the division of labor in promoting economic growth. Book II focuses on the role played by the accumulation and use of capital. Two ideas lie at the heart of Smith's capital theory. First, Smith asserts that the accumulation of capital is a necessary precondition to the division of labor. As the division of labor advances, an increasing amount of capital must be accumulated beforehand in order to provide workers with the equipment and materials necessary for production (1965, pp. 259-260). Second, he maintains that there is a distinction between productive and nonproductive labor. "The annual produce of the land and labour of any nation can be increased in its value by no other means, but by increasing either the number of its productive labourers, or the productive powers of those labourers who had before been employed" (1965, p. 326). In other words, capital expended on nonproductive activities is considered to be wasted capital, at least in terms of promoting economic growth and increasing the wealth of the nation.

Book II concludes with a discussion of why capital can be used more fruitfully in one sector of the economy than in another in light of these two ideas. Smith notes that capital employed in the retail trade can support those productive shopkeepers and tradesmen who sell directly to the consumer. In their profits "consists the whole value which its employment adds to the annual produce of the land and labour of the society" (1965, p. 343). Capital can also be used to promote the transportation of crude and manufactured products from where they abound to where they are needed. Employing capital in this manner not only directly supports the productive activities of wholesale merchants, but also indirectly puts into motion the labor of the farmer and the manufacturer. "Its operation in both these respects is a good deal superior to that of the capital of the retailer" (1965, p. 344). Capital also can be used in the manufacture and preparation of raw materials and produce for immediate use and consumption, which puts into motion an even greater quantity of productive labor than does an equal amount in the hands of a wholesale merchant. Finally, Smith notes that capital can be employed in obtaining the crude produce needed for the use

and consumption of society. "The capital employed in agriculture, therefore, not only puts into motion a greater quantity of productive labour than any equal capital employed in manufactures, but in proportion too to the quantity of productive labour which it employs, it adds a much greater value to the annual produce of the land and labour of the country, to the real wealth and revenue of its inhabitants." Capital used in agriculture was considered to be "by far the most advantageous to the society" (1965, p. 345).

Smith's economic understanding of the place of agriculture in a commercial society clearly lies outside the civic humanist matrix of property-personality-virtue. Agriculture is important not because it is the foundation upon which civic virtue rests, but because it is the optimal sector for allocating capital. This point is reemphasized in chapter 1 of Book III of *The Wealth of Nations*, "Of the Natural Progress of Opulence," where Smith describes optimal capital allocation under conditions of natural liberty.

According to Smith, a man will naturally prefer to employ his capital in the improvement and cultivation of land, rather than in trade or manufacture, given equal or nearly equal profits. "The man who employs his capital in land, has it more under his view and command, and his fortune is much less liable to accidents, than that of the trader, who is obliged frequently to commit it, not only to the winds and the waves, but to the more uncertain elements of human folly and injustice, by giving great credits in distant countries to men, whose character and situation he can seldom be thoroughly acquainted" (1965, p. 358). Similarly, given equal or near equal profits, a man will naturally prefer to employ capital in domestic manufacturing than in foreign commerce. As Smith explains, "As the capital of the landlord or farmer is more secure than that of the manufacturer, so the capital of the manufacturer, being at all times more within his view and command, is more secure than that of the foreign merchant" (1965, p. 359). In other words, according to a "natural progress of opulence," capital is directed in a growing commercial society first to agriculture, then to manufacture, and finally to foreign commerce. "This order of things is so very natural, that in every society that had any territory, it has always, I believe, been in some degree observed" (1965, p. 360).

It is within the context of this discussion of the natural progress of the opulence that Smith takes up the historical arguments considered by Hume. Although Smith believes that economic growth must take place to some degree according to the natural progress of opulence, he observes that in all modern European states the "natural order of things" has become "in many respects, entirely inverted." Modern Europeans often find it more to their advantage to employ their capital in distant foreign commerce, even though much of the land in their own country remains underdeveloped or uncultivated. In addition, he points out that manufacture and commerce were responsible for giving birth to the major improvements in agriculture in Europe. In contrast to Hume, Smith thus is not interested primarily in explaining how commerce had promoted, rather than undermined, liberty in the modern world. Instead, he wants to explain what circumstances forced European states "necessarily . . . into this unnatural and retrograde order" (1965, p. 360). For Smith, this boils down to understanding how some political arrangements stifled natural economic growth, whereas others promoted a seemingly unnatural form.

The "economic" problematic that underlies Smith's historical arguments is clearly evident in three of the four chapters of Book III. In chapter 2 Smith explains how the feudal institutions of primogeniture and entails were responsible for undermining the natural progress of opulence from the fall of Rome to the modern commercial era. Because the great feudal landlords simply lacked the ability or the incentive to cultivate and improve the land, stimulus for economic growth in the countryside ultimately had to come from some sector of the economy that had escaped the restrictions of feudal laws and custom. In chapter 3 he describes how towns and cities gradually freed themselves from the political rule of the feudal landlords. Finally, in chapter 4 he discusses the impact that independent town life had upon European economic development.

For Smith, unlike Hume, the significance of the rise and development of commerce out of independent town life does not lie simply in the political fact that it introduced good government and liberty into the modern world; it lies in the economic fact that the modern mercantile order had developed contrary to the natural order of things. In the past, foreign commerce had been the leading sector of economic growth and had been responsible for stimulating growth in all other sectors of the economy. As Smith's capital theory shows, however, foreign commerce was also the least productive and most unstable sector of the economy. As long as the nation continued to rely upon foreign commerce as it had in the past, future economic prosperity would rest upon the most unstable of foundations.[2]

[2]Smith writes, "The capital, however, that is acquired to any country by commerce and manufactures, is all a very precarious and uncertain possession, till some part of it has been secured and realised in the cultivation and

In sum, Smith's discussion of the rise and development of commercial society out of the feudal system and his use of Humean historical arguments about the relationship between commerce and liberty lie outside the rhetoric of civic humanist critics of commercial society. Smith's arguments culminate not with a rejection of commercial society but with an appeal to throw off the mercantilist policies that continued to force the British economy into an "unnatural and retrograde order." Similarly, the call for a "system of natural liberty" is not a rejection of the modern commercial order and the economic growth that was an essential part of it; it is an affirmation of the commercial order and a call to place future economic growth on more secure foundations.

The Four-Stage Theory

Winch's misinterpretation of the politics of Adam Smith is not limited to his analysis of Smith's account of the rise of commercial societies in Book III of *The Wealth of Nations.* He also fails to appreciate fully how Smith's analyses of particular problems were shaped by the so-called four-stage theory, or how this theory set apart Smith's political ideas from the thought of other civic humanist writers. This failure is particularly evident in Winch's analysis of Smith's contribution to the standing army controversy (1978, chap. 5).

For most modern readers, Smith's inquiry into the nature and expense of military defense in the different stages of society seems rather inconsequential and parochial. In the context of eighteenth-century England, however, he was addressing one of the most sensitive political issues of the day—the question of the standing army. For civic humanist pamphleteers throughout the eighteenth century, the existence of the standing army was perceived to be a constant threat to civil liberty; it reflected the corruption introduced into the body politic by commerce. Only by maintaining a watchful citizen militia, they argued, was it possible to secure the nation from those forces that threatened it both from within and without (Pocock, 1973, chap. 4; Winch, 1978, chap. 5).

Like other contemporary civic humanist writers such as Adam Ferguson and John Millar, Smith was willing to concede that there were basically two methods by which a modern commercial society could protect itself from outside invasion. Either it could attempt to instill a martial spirit into the entire population "by means of a very rigorous police," an alternatiave supported by Ferguson, or it could "render the trade of a soldier a particular trade, separate and distinct from all the others" (1965, pp. 658-660). The first option, Smith notes, went against the interests as well as the natural inclinations of those who live in a commercial society. No matter how disciplined such a force might become, it would always be inferior to a well-disciplined and well-trained military force. His position in regard to the standing-army controversy thus pits him directly against contemporary civic humanists. Only by means of a professional standing army could a commercial society protect itself from the violence and injustice of other states.

Winch concedes that Smith's position on the standing-army controversy places him at odds with contemporary civic humanist thought, but he nevertheless maintains that the setting and the premises on which he poses the problem leave Smith in the civic humanist matrix. In particular, Winch notes that the discussion takes place in the context of a moral and social analysis of the consequences of the division of labor in modern societies and reflects a civic humanist concern over the preconditions for effective citizenship (1978, p. 113). Unfortunately, at least for Winch's argument, Smith himself does not use the republican notion of citizenship in his analysis of commercial society. Indeed, it will be argued below that such a concept, as well as the accompanying civic humanist notions of virtue and corruption, are foreign to his understanding of the modern commercial order. Moreover, his discussion of the social and moral consequences of the division of labor is actually part of a larger argument, the so-called four-stage theory, that places his analysis of the standing-army controversy firmly outside the civic humanist worldview.

Smith's four-stage theory originates with his contention in both the unpublished *Lectures on Justice, Police, Revenue and Arms* and Book V of *The Wealth of Nations* that there are four distinct stages to human society: hunting, pasturage, farming, and commerce. In categorizing each stage of human history by the mode of subsistence that predominates in it, Smith is not trying to make a Marxian-type argument that these are the actual stages of western European historical development. Instead, he is trying to formulate a

improvement of its lands. A merchant, it has been said very properly, is not necessarily the citizen of any particular country. It is in a great measure indifferent to him from what place he carries on his trade; and a very trifling disgust will make him remove his capital, and together with it all the industry which it supports, from one country to another. No part of it can be said to belong to any particular country, till it has been spread as it were over the face of that country, either in buildings, or in the lasting improvement of lands" (1965, p. 395). For a discussion of Smith's capital theory, see Bowley (1975) and Hollander (1973).

developmental perspective for understanding how and why different stages of economic development give rise to different sorts of political arrangements and what the proper role of political institutions should be in the modern commercial order (Höpfl, 1978; Skinner, 1967, 1975).

Significantly, this general line of argument bears little resemblance to the cyclical notions of time and economic change found in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century civic humanist thought.[3] On the contrary, it represents an extension of the natural histories of economic improvement and societal development found in the work of Locke, Mandeville, and Hume. Much like the natural histories of these earlier liberal writers, Smith's four-stage theory is used to explain why political institutions in a commercial society were necessarily different from those in earlier stages of society, and what the proper functions of these institutions were, given the social, political, and economic problems brought on by economic development.[4]

The way in which this liberal four-stage theory shapes Smith's perception of the standing-army controversy is delineated at the beginning of Book V of *The Wealth of Nations,* where he considers the duties that remain for a sovereign under the system of natural liberty. "The first duty of the sovereign," writes Smith, "that of protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies, can be performed only by means of a military force. But the expence both of preparing this military force in time of peace, and of employing it in time of war, is very different in the different stages of society, in the different periods of improvement" (1965, p. 653).

According to Smith, in a nation of hunters, every man is a warrior as well as a hunter. When a hunter goes to war, he maintains himself by his own labor, much as he would during times of peace. As a result, a hunter society "is at no sort of expence either to prepare him for the field, or to maintain him while he is in it" (1965, p. 653). The military situation in more advanced countries differs considerably from that found in the more primitive hunting societies. Shepherd societies have no fixed place of habitation, and thus, unlike hunter societies, are not completely limited by the bounty of nature. Although an army of hunters might be limited to 200 or 300 men because of their precarious mode of subsistence, an army of shepherds could potentially number in the thousands. A nation of shepherds thus is a much more formidable military opponent than a nation of hunters (1965, pp. 653-654).

The military situation found in more advanced farming societies is different still. In a farming society having little foreign commerce and no manufacture, every man remains a warrior or easily becomes one. The hardiness of ordinary life in a farming society prepares individuals physically and mentally for the rigors of war. As long as military expeditions begin after seed-time and end before harvest, an individual is able to participate in military affairs with little or no cost to himself. As in hunting and shepherd societies, the expense of war falls on the warriors themselves, not upon the sovereign (1965, p. 655). In terms of Smith's four-stage theory, the age of the husbandmen is effectively the age of the civic humanist citizen militia.

Three factors intervene in modern commercial societies to undermine the viability of citizen militias. First, the progress of manufactures makes it all but impossible for an individual who goes to war to maintain himself at his own expense. Whereas in an earlier stage of society a man could take to the field without seriously disturbing his source of income, in a commercial age a worker who is compelled to quit his place of work also loses his sole source of income. Similarly, farmers have little extra time for warfare, given the improvements that the progress of manufactures introduces into the countryside. As a result, "Military exercises come to be as much neglected by the inhabitants of the country as by those in the town, and the great body of the people becomes altogether unwarlike" (1965, p. 659). Second, improvements in the art of war make it one of the most intricate and complicated arts in a commercial society. In order to master this art it becomes necessary for the citizen to spend an increasing amount of time in military exercises. Third, the wealth that follows from the economic improvements found in commercial societies provokes the invasion of all their neighbors who desire their wealth. "An industrious, and upon that account a wealthy nation," Smith thus con-

[3]By noting that two important republican writers of the day, Adam Ferguson and John Millar, made arguments that paralleled those developed by Smith in his four-stage theory, Winch appears to argue that Smith therefore employs a civic humanist line of argument in his political thought. However, quite the contrary was the case. By grounding some of their arguments in a four-stage theory argument, both Ferguson and Millar were introducing tensions into their own thought that could not be easily reconciled with their republican values.

[4]It is important to recognize that the four-stage theory is not purely a product of the liberal tradition. The earliest modern versions of a stage-theory argument are found more frequently in continental rather than British writers. Moreover, Ronald Meek has argued that the four-stage theory is actually a pre-Marxist rather than a liberal theory. (See Cumming, 1969; Höpfl, 1978; Meek, 1967, 1977; Skinner, 1967, 1975.)

cludes, "is of all nations the most likely to be attacked; and unless the state takes some new measures for the public defence, the natural habits of the people render them altogether incapable of defending themselves" (1965, p. 659).

By considering the question of the standing army in terms of the four-stage theory, Smith thus was able to account for the fact that at a certain age in societal development citizen militias could protect the nation from external threats. In addition, it enabled him to explain why in a commercial society such an option was no longer viable. In Smith's mind, a standing army had to be maintained by a commercial society if it were to "be perpetuated, or even preserved for any considerable time" (1965, p. 667). Far from revealing civic humanist leanings, the four-stage theory demonstrates how far out of touch with the problems of a modern commercial society Smith views civic humanist thought to be.

Corruption in Commercial Society

Two questions remain to be considered: What notions of corruption and public-mindedness does one find in Smith's work? How do these notions differ from those found in the civic humanist tradition? It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive examination of the moral theory found in *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1976) or the way in which this moral theory complements and reinforces the economic arguments found in *The Wealth of Nations.* These issues have been dealt with at great length in other works on Smith (see Campbell, 1971; Cropsey, 1957; Lindgren, 1973; Morrow, 1969). However, we can briefly explain why Smith's notions of corruption and public-mindedness stand outside a civic humanist vision of the commercial order and what these show about a Smithian understanding of the problems confronting a modern commercial society.

One of the most striking differences between Smith's understanding of corruption and public-mindedness and that of contemporary civic humanist writers can be seen in the distinct underlying concerns. As noted earlier, civic humanists were concerned with the economic preconditions for independent action as a citizen. Landed property was perceived to be the foundation upon which an individual's civic personality was based because it enabled an individual to act autonomously and virtuously in public affairs. Significantly, Smith's discussion does not center around an analysis of the economic preconditions to effective citizenship, but around a discussion of the psychological ties that bind men together in all societies.

According to Smith, every independent state is divided into a number of different orders, each with its own particular privileges, powers, and immunities. The constitution of a particular state is determined by the orders found in a society and the distribution of powers, privileges, and immunities found among them (1976, pp. 376-377). Every individual is naturally, that is psychologically, more attached to one's own particular order than to any other and seeks to expand and defend that order's privileges and immunities from the encroachments of other orders. This partiality is not necessarily bad, because it provides an important psychological check upon undesirable social changes. As Smith notes, "It tends to preserve whatever is the established balance among the different orders and societies into which the state is divided; and while it sometimes appears to obstruct some alterations of government which may be fashionable and popular at the time, it contributes in reality to the stability and permanency of the whole system" (1976, p. 377).

Along a similar line of argument, Smith maintains that the ties that ultimately bind these different orders together into a common political community, like those that tie individuals to their own order in society, are also derived from the moral sentiments. Indeed, Smith maintains that the distinction of ranks and the order of society are ultimately founded upon the disposition of mankind to go along with the passions of the rich and the powerful (1976, pp. 114-116). As Smith explains,

> That kings are the servants of the people, to be obeyed, resisted, deposed, or punished, as the public conveniency may require, is the doctrine of reason and philosophy; but it is not the doctrine of nature. Nature would teach us to submit to them for their own sake, to tremble and bow down before their exalted station, to regard their smile as a reward sufficient to compensate any services, and to dread their displeasure, though no other evil were to follow from it, as the severest of all mortifications. (1976, p. 116)

The political community found in a commercial society thus does not emerge out of the activities of economically independent citizens. It arises out of the natural disposition in individuals to defer to others in positions of authority.

A tone of uncertainty and anguish underlies Smith's discussion of the psychological phenomena found in all human societies that stands in contrast to the moderately upbeat and self-confident tone found in civic humanism. Smith's ideas reflect a world view that appears to be unsure of itself and of its future. His concern is not to create better citizens who can participate in the political life of the community, nor is it to reform

the existing power structure. It is to maintain those conditions most highly conducive to the continuance of existing authority relations. The world of Adam Smith is not the civic humanist world analyzed by Pocock nor is it the world of nineteenth- and twentieth-century mass democracy. It is the troubled world of early liberalism sketched out by Wolin in *Politics and Vision* (1960, chap. 9). Nothing makes this more evident than Smith's conceptualization of the problems introduced into the commercial order by the division of labor.

Smith fully recognizes the devastating impact that the division of labor could have upon the work force. A man who spent his whole life performing a few simple operations naturally loses his ability to exercise his mind "and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become." As Smith explains,

> The torpor of his mind renders him, not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life. Of the great and extensive interest of his country he is altogether incapable of judging; . . . The uniformity of his stationary life . . . corrupts even the activity of his body, and renders him incapable of exerting his strength with vigour and perseverance, in any other employment than that to which he has been bred. His dexterity at his own particular trade seems, in this manner, to be acquired at the expense of his intellectual, social, and martial virtues. But in every improved and civilized society this is the state into which the labouring poor, that is, the great body of the people, must necessarily fall, unless government takes some pains to prevent it." (1965, pp. 734-735)

In Winch's mind, this discussion of the mental mutilation of the work force brought on by the division of labor is further evidence of the humanistic side to Smith's politics. This reading simply fails to understand the concerns lying behind the discussion. Smith's concern is not with making workers into responsible citizens in the republican sense of the term. His four-stage theory had shown how foreign to a modern commercial society such a notion of citizenship was. In a commercial society, workers could not be expected to perform the military duties assumed by republican-minded citizens in farming societies (see Smith, 1965, pp. 658-659). Moreover, as the above quotation shows, Smith simply does not believe that a modern worker is capable of participating rationally in the political world. His concern is that the division of labor might dehumanize the worker to such a degree that the moral sentiments themselves might become corrupted and that the psychological bonds that tie the various orders in a society together might be torn asunder. Consequently, his solution to the problem of the division of labor, public education, is not aimed at creating independent citizens in the republican sense of the term; rather it is concerned with preventing "the almost entire corruption and degeneracy of the great body of the people" (1965, p. 734). This concern over the corruption of the moral sentiments of the people is shown clearly in a fascinating passage from Book V of *The Wealth of Nations.*

> Though the state was to derive no advantage from the instruction of the inferior ranks of people, it would still deserve its attention that they should not be altogether uninstructed. The state, however, derives no inconsiderable advantage from their instruction. The more they are instructed, the less liable they are to the delusions of enthusiasm and superstition, which, among ignorant nations, frequently occasion the most dreadful disorders. An instructed and intelligent people besides, are always more decent and orderly than an ignorant and stupid one. They feel themselves, each individually more respectable, and more likely to obtain the respect of their lawful superiors. . . . They are more disposed to examine, and more capable of seeing through the interested complaints of faction and sedition, and they are, upon that account, less apt to be misled into any wanton or unnecessary opposition to the measures of government. In free countries, where the safety of government depends very much upon the favorable judgment which the people may form of its conduct, it must surely be of the highest importance that they should not be disposed to judge rashly or capriciously concerning it. (1965, p. 740)

In short, the notion of corruption found in Smith's discussion is qualitatively different from that found in the civic humanist tradition. Rather than emerging out of a concern over the economic preconditions for the independent action on the part of the citizen, or centering around the property-personality-civic virtue paradigm traced out by Pocock, Smith's notion of corruption emerges out of his concern for the psychological attachments which tie men in different social orders together into a common political community and make authority relations possible.

Public-mindedness

Like his analysis of corruption in a commercial society, Smith's discussion of the problem of get-

ting people to act in the public interest exists far outside the civic humanist world view. For the civic humanist, this problem was solved by creating "virtuous men" who had the economic independence to be able to transcend their private interests and to look upon the good of the community as a whole. Such a solution was unavailable to Smith. Smith recognizes that in a commercial society, individuals stood in constant need of the cooperation and assistance of others. One could not reasonably expect to gain this through either friendship or benevolence. Commercial society was simply too large and diverse for such bonds of affection to tie individuals together for any period of time. Indeed, Smith notes that an individual would be much more likely to gain the assistance of others by appealing to self-interest. "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages" (1965, p. 14).[5]

For Smith, the problem of public-mindedness had to be dealt with in terms of the self-interest of individuals, not in spite of it. His concern was not to discuss how political actors could transcend their self-interest, but how this self-interest ultimately was tied to the public interest. When does the self-interest of an individual coincide with the public interest? When does it not? What factors might motivate political actors to seek out the public interest while acting in their own interest? These are the questions that propel his thought forward. His answers do not lie outside his economic theory, but are firmly embedded in it.

All too often, the underlying political objective of Smith's economic theory in *The Wealth of Nations* is forgotten by commentators. Smith was not writing an abstract treatise on economics that was to be read solely by academic scribes. He was addressing a particular order—the landlords in parliament—with a particular political objective in mind: to teach them what their economic interests were in a commercial society. Smith recognizes that of the three great orders in a commercial society, the landlords, the laborers, and the mercantile-manufacturers, only the latter had acquired a true understanding of what their specific interests were in matters of economic policy. Laborers had neither the time nor the necessary education or habits to think about public affairs in any systematic manner. The landlords, on the other hand, often suffered from an indolence "which is the natural effect of the ease and security of their situation" and which left them "not only ignorant but incapable of that application of mind which is necessary in order to foresee and understand the consequences of any public regulation" (1965, pp. 248-259).

The consequences of this state of affairs were devastating. By a superior knowledge of their own interest, the mercantile-manufacturer order had been able to impose its will upon the generosity of the "country gentleman" in parliament by convincing him that their interest, and not his or the laborers, was the interest of the public. As Smith warns, "The interests of the dealers, however, in any particular branch of trade or manufactures, is always in some respects different from, and even opposite to, that of the public" (1965, p. 250).

The economic theory developed in Book I of *The Wealth of Nations* is meant to provide the landlord order with an understanding of why the interest of the mercantile-manufacturer order differed from the general interest of society and why the interest of the landlord order was "strictly and inseparably" connected with it. In providing the members of the landlord order with an understanding of their own class-interest in economic affairs, Smith also was trying to teach them how to act in the long-run interest of the community as a whole. As Smith concludes at the end of Book I, "When the public deliberates concerning any regulation of commerce or police, the proprietors of land never can mislead it, with a view to promote the interest of their own particular order; at least, if they have any tolerable knowledge of that interest" (1965, p. 249). For Smith, economic theory thus held the key to getting people to act in the public interest. By teaching them what their own interest was in economic matters, those country gentlemen could also be pushed to act in the public interest.

Interestingly, Smith does not believe that economic theory rightly understood need appeal solely to policymakers' naked self-interest. It could also appeal to their love of system and their regard for the beauty of order, of art, and of con-

[5]Smith does note in *A Theory of Moral Sentiments,* "The wise and virtuous man is at all times willing that his own private interest should be sacrificed to the public interest of his own particular order or society. He is at all times willing, too, that the interest of this order or society should be sacrificed to the greater interest of the state or sovereignty of which it is only a subordinate part" (1976, p. 384). The notion of virtue discussed here, however, is a private-personal virtue, not a public one. In neither *The Wealth of Nations* nor in *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* does he argue that the solution to the problem of public-mindedness in a commercial society lies primarily in the creation of virtuous men. Kramnick argues that a new liberal notion of virtue emerged in eighteenth-century political thought that was tied into the idea of the self-centered individual who participated in the market (1982, pp. 663-664).

trivance; that is, to their moral sentiments. Smith writes,

> The perfection of police, the extension of trade and manufactures, are noble and magnificent objects. The contemplation of them pleases us, and we are interested in whatever can tend to advance them. They make part of the great system of government, and the wheels of the political machine seem to move with more harmony and ease by means of them. We take pleasure in beholding the perfection of so beautiful and so grand a system, and we are uneasy till we remove any obstruction that can in the least disturb or encumber the regularity of its motions. (1976, p. 305)

If a policymaker correctly understands the forces that move a modern commercial economy forward, he will be "animated to some degree of public spirit" and will feel some desire to remove those obstructions that prevent "so beautiful and so orderly a machine" from working properly. As Smith explains,

> Nothing tends so much to promote public spirit as the study of politics,—of the several systems of civil government, their advantages and disadvantages,—of the constitutions of our own country, its situation, and interest with regard to foreign nations, its commerce, its defense, the disadvantages it labours under, the dangers to which it may be exposed, how to remove the one and how to guard against the other. Upon this account political disquisitions, if just, and reasonable, and practicable, are of all the works of speculation, the most useful. Even the weakest and the worst of them are not altogether without their utility. They serve at least to animate the public passions of men, and rouse them to seek out the means of promoting the happiness of the society. (1976, p. 307)

In sum, for Smith the problem of instilling a concern over the public interest into the political order was not one that involved maintaining the economic preconditions for the independent action of an autonomous citizen. It was the establishment of the correct psychological disposition in the minds of policymakers to promote policies that served the public interest. The notion of public-mindedness found in Smith's work, like that of corruption, thus is quite different from that found in civic humanism. It is a liberal public-mindedness that accepts and, at times, champions, the self-interest that lies at the heart of modern commercial society. It is a liberal public-mindedness that is integrally related to liberal economic theory.

Conclusion

I have examined critically Donald Winch's civic humanist reading of Adam Smith's politics. My ongoing concern has been to explain why Smith's political thought should not be read apart from his economic thought or the larger conceptual framework within which his perception of commercial society operates. I do not mean to imply that conventional treatments of Smith's political thought fully appreciate the political dimension to Smith's thought. Winch is quite correct when he argues that far too little attention is paid to Smith's concern over the problems of corruption and public-mindedness in the modern commercial order. Unfortunately, Winch fails to see how closely connected to Smith's economic theory proper his understanding of these problems are. For Smith, economic theory is an important mode of political discourse that is integrally related to his political thought and his perception of the problems confronting the modern commercial order. Our failure to understand Smith as a political thinker does not reside simply in our failure to appreciate the "political" dimensions to his thought, but in our failure to understand how economic discourse itself shaped his perception of the modern commercial order.[6]

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[6]Political theorists' general failure to appreciate the political implications of liberal economic thought is not limited to the case of Adam Smith. For example, the actual economic writings of John Locke have all but been ignored by political theorists. For a discussion of the relationship between Lockean political and economic thought see Harpham (in press) and Vaughn (1980).

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