

# economics & *language*

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## MONEY TALKS: THE RHETORICAL PROJECT OF THE *WEALTH OF NATIONS*

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My task is to outline what Adam Smith might have thought he was doing in writing the *Wealth of Nations* (hereafter, WN) – that is, what kind of act of rhetoric he was committing. Whatever act it was, it was extremely powerful. At various times the vision he put forward has been associated with a new science, the intellectual machinery of that new discipline, major legislative changes in Britain and throughout the world, one of the founding ideologies of the country whose economics have in this century reordered international political and economic relations, the invention of its dialectical collectivist opposite which has formed its partner in the ideological and political struggles of this century, and generally the modern way of life. No text can do all of this on its own. Much has been attributed to WN, much simplified and reduced, much repainted in the colours of ideology, and much just misunderstood. Nonetheless, powerful stories generate many meanings, interpretations, folk retellings, and curious social reputations. Smith had to give all these interested users and reinterpreters something to work with.

While I am not inquiring into what use people have made of Smith's work (that is, what his text did to and for them) I will address what he thought he was doing to them, his rhetorical intention.<sup>1</sup> To understand his intention, however, we must first reconstruct the rhetorical universe he imagined himself to be taking part in. It is his imagination of the rhetorical world that produced the document.

A reading of the Smith corpus reveals him as self-consciously attempting to create a new basis for social order through persuasion (and in his terms conviction). The social order was to avoid the dominations of the prior forms of hierarchical order and the new forms of social contract. And this social order, while providing the basis for liberty and individual development, would not rely on consistent rational thought or continuing commit-

ment to an ideal of state and order. Rather, this order would recognize that people are not primarily philosophers or patriots or altruists, but are rather self-interested, irrational, idiosyncratic, short-sighted, and frequently unjust to one another. By appealing precisely to a least common denominator of behaviour, further reduced by a translation of desire into a universal desire for money as the means to other forms of satisfaction, Smith would attract continuing commitment to a social order through the selfish actions of individuals. Yet those who have achieved enough social standing to be influential in the shaping of the system also have access to a sympathetic vision of the long-term benefits of a new economic-political order, so that they can commit themselves to the machinery and laws of government.

Smith, living in a philosophic world deeply influenced by his good friend David Hume, did not believe that humans were primarily rational syllogists. As we find out what he did come to believe, we will start to see why he wrote WN and why he wrote it the way he did. In this essay I want to operationalize Smith's beliefs into a rhetorical landscape within which he acted.

#### THE RECENT HISTORICIZING OF SMITH'S ACHIEVEMENT

An historicizing reevaluation of Smith began perhaps three decades ago (and gained real momentum in the last fifteen years) to rescue Smith from his reputation of the last 150 years as the founding father of modern economics.<sup>2</sup> For the larger part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, all of Smith's vision and wisdom seemed to be contained within those parts of WN that could be seen through the retrospective lenses of modern economics. However, attempts to understand Smith's other major work published in his lifetime *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS) brought attention to a side of Smith that seemed to extend beyond the rational self-calculation libertarian economists attributed to him.<sup>3</sup> Concern for others, critique of rentholders and stock investors in WN, imagination of society as something other than a marketplace, recognition of the moral social self, and keen observation of human irrationality provided a new vision of Smith's science of man, displacing *homo economicus* with a much more complex and less predictable being. TMS also pointed towards a social role Smith described as appropriate for the virtuous community elder, moved by prudence, justice and benevolence and in self-command, one that seemed to describe his condition and self-conception: the role of legislator, inventing new terms of social order and civil society for the community at large. Smith now began to appear a self-conscious agent of social change, a shaper of political initiatives. Moreover, once he was viewed as a social actor, the curiosity of his life, where he was acting

neither as an entrepreneurial economic man nor a quiet academic, became a more clearly posed puzzle.

Concern for his science of the legislator was then further pursued through examination of his earlier *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (LJ).<sup>4</sup> This resulted in attempts to reconcile his politics with his economics, to place his economic thinking more fully in the tradition of political economy as well as more general tradition of political philosophy, and to locate his specific issues and stands within the politics of his century and specific years. The reconciliation of these viewpoints into a unified view of Smith is still a matter of contention (see, for example, Haakonssen 1981), germane to contemporary issues of economic policy and relationship between institutions of government and institutions of economics.

Two other early texts have only peripherally been brought into this conversation: the early *Essays on Philosophical Subjects* (EPS) – particularly the most developed *History of Astronomy* – dating from the 1760's but published posthumously in 1795, and the even earlier *Lectures on Rhetoric* (LR)<sup>5</sup> – Smith's first public performance dating from 1748, but never published in his lifetime.<sup>6</sup> I will look back to these early works in order to provide some new perspectives on the entire corpus by establishing a context and framework for the rhetorical action of WN.

My move to look back into earliest sources, to sketch out the growth of Smith's visions reverses the overall strategy of thinking about the meaning of Smith's work. The mature work was treated as the important statement to be enriched by perspectives of earlier thought. Rather, we see here a trajectory of a life project bringing itself into being. The move here is from an interpretation of a canonical text (canonized, as canonizations always are, retrospectively and Whiggishly) to constructing a *bildungsroman* of a person who acted through making statements. Smith is to be seen as one of those remarkable enlightenment figures like Franklin, Jefferson, Priestley, and Hume, who developed a coherent vision of the world as part of their own attempt to come to reasoned action and participate in the evolving political society, self-consciously creating new terms for social order.

In representing this view of a life trajectory within a growing personally constructed universe, I will rely heavily on implication. First I will be extending fragmentary remarks to construct an intellectual trajectory from them; that is seeing where those remarks are tending to lead his thought. Second I will be inferring the kind of universe such beliefs imply and what kind of action universe Smith thereby is placing himself into. And finally, I will be inferring a constructive developmental connection among his various works, seeing them as part of a single but complex evolving universe, the actions of a single man and a single consciousness as he brings his world into being over the course of a life, intersecting with the other lives of his times. With so many levels of inference of such deep and encompassing kinds, I can hardly argue that I am presenting an ironclad

Hume, leads him to approach linguistic and rhetorical issues in striking and novel ways. The lectures are organized around linguistic, stylistic, and rhetorical typologies, so the psychology is not explicitly articulated as a coherent system of intersubjective symbolic transactions; however, many pieces float in an undercurrent, which can be reconstructed as a psychological theory.<sup>9</sup>

To start, Smith seems to have some notion of prototypes of language use – certain familiar categories, well rehearsed in a language that allows most readers to feel comfortable and secure in the meanings employing these familiar categories and to have greater intersubjective agreement over meanings generated using those familiar categories. One place where the personal and intersubjective force of the prototypical emerges is in the chapter on lexical choice. Smith recommends choosing familiar and native words over unfamiliar, learned or foreign alternatives, not on the usual grounds of the natural superiority of the plain-speaking native tongue and distrust of the learned foreignisms, but because the native terms are most familiar, communicative, and free of ambiguity. Communication is facilitated by seeking the least common denominator, for that is where minds will meet most fully and surely. Similarly, at the level of syntax Smith recommends use of standard sentence order and short sentences for clarity's sake. Inversions, ellipses, digressions and ornaments are to be rejected. Smith suggests a kind of flow of meaning that implies something like functional linguistics' 'given-new' and 'theme-rheme' contracts.<sup>10</sup> The only legitimate forces that Smith recognizes for sentence length or complexity (beyond the role of passions, to be discussed below) are precision and the spelling out of logical relationships through syntactical forms and markers.

The negative implication of this preference for prototypical language forms is a kind of reader response theory, where spread of meaning and miscommunication are the rule rather than the exception. Communication is an achievement and not a taken for granted natural consequence of language use. Intersubjectivity is not to be expected, nor any certain human cooperation, understanding, or coordination.

The spread of meaning and the recognition of the different associationist paths that reside within different humans suggest that not only do people think idiosyncratically, but that passions and feelings become the nexus of each individual's associationist web. Passions and feelings instantiate the force of all one's associations within any circumstance. In successful communication these passions and feelings must be both respected and served. At the level of syntax, Smith sees passion and feelings as appropriate justifications for varying from syntactical order. Smith's overall recommendation is 'that must be the best order which most naturally occurs to the mind and best expresses the sense of the speaker concerning what he speaks' (LR: 17).<sup>11</sup> Liveliness within sentences comes from placing what is most interesting or pressing in first position and so on throughout the

case. All I have to offer to elicit conviction is that the story here presented makes a lot of sense and helps bring together many pieces in a plausible train of associations.

Within this argument there is a kind of double motion as well. I lay out Smith's universe as purely a local story of his view of life. But, in doing so, I also lay out the plausibility of his account of social order and suggest its influence on who we have become. Or to put a different gloss on it, Smith, by identifying and fostering a symbolic medium for our society, has deeply conditioned who we are; therefore, we recognize ourselves in the account which has created the symbolic tools of our psycho-social cultural life.

### THE LECTURES ON RHETORIC

From the beginning Adam Smith was concerned with symbolic activities (that is, activities carried out through symbols) and the creation of inter-subjective realities. The first work for which Smith gained attention was a series of *Lectures on Rhetoric*, first delivered in Edinburgh in 1748-9 and delivered regularly thereafter in his various posts through the 1760's.<sup>7</sup> In articulating how he perceived rhetorical practice, Smith constructs a universe within which discourse takes place and is operative. Although his practice may have evolved from these foundations, here he is first drawing a picture of the universe of discursive transactions and the kinds of creatures who engage in it.<sup>8</sup>

As Howell (1975) notes, Smith is among the first to consider all discursive relations as the realm of rhetoric and not just argumentation in a political or theological forum. In particular, with respect to the founding of economics, he considers as part of rhetoric the development and dissemination of knowledge, (which both Plato and Aristotle placed outside rhetoric – one within dialectic and the other within logic and the special topics – although the suppressed sophistic tradition did not). By placing such discourse under the umbrella of his new category of didactic rhetoric, he opens it to an analysis of the symbolic means by which articulation, communication and conviction of knowledge are achieved. The representation of knowledge is to him as much an issue of linguistic construction and strategic formulation as a court pleading. Indeed, the further implication is that all transactions are mediated by symbols and are thus open to rhetorical thinking, analysis and planning.

#### **An associationist psychological rhetoric**

Moreover, Smith seats rhetorical transactions in psychology – what is powerful and motivating to one mind and interpretable and moving to another mind. His version of associationist psychology, influenced by

sentence. However, as this strains the plain (and most prototypical and most easily understood) sentence order, this urgency of the passions overrides the plain speaking of common sense.

The role of the passionate drive of meaning in shaping utterance similarly lies behind his analysis of tropes and figures. He sees tropes and figures as having no liveliness or beauty within themselves and finds therefore Ciceronian taxonomies of tropes as foolish. Rather, he sees beauty and power of tropes coming from the sentiment and sympathies driving their creation. Later he comments more generally concerning the perfection of style:

Expressing in the most concise, proper and precise manner the thought of the author in the manner which best conveys the sentiment, passion or affection with which it affects or he pretends it does affect him and which he designs to communicate to his reader.

(LR: 55)

Thus, the kind of psychological engagement a writer of various sorts ought to have, should, according to Smith, determine the style appropriate to the discourse. Historians, who seek disengagement from the lively concerns reported on, should, therefore, avoid the bolder tropes. Orators, on the other hand, necessarily seek involvement and therefore ought to use lively, bold figures as the meaning suggests. Didactic writers partake, according to Smith, of both the historical and oratorical impulses and thus ought to engage a style that reflects their lively involvement in meanings even while they avoid the extremes of persuasion that urges rather than convinces. This psycho-sociological analysis suggests that the nature of the rhetorical task implies an intellectual-emotive economy for the rhetor, a corresponding style that expresses the relationship of rhetor to the subject, and a relationship to the audience which is brought into contact with the subject matter through the intellectual-emotive stance established by the rhetor. In a similar vein, in commenting on Swift's works, he remarks that all ridicule is inappropriate for a gentleman except that which exposes real foibles or blemishes of character with the aim of reform and benefit of mankind (LR: 47).

Yet, although he sees the passions and sentiments at the heart of meaning, it is not the passions in themselves that are the meaning. They are states accompanying meaning as it comes into being. Narrating directly the names of emotions or the generic descriptions of character carry little force, for the 'effect of one tincture of virtue upon one another is what makes the individual in response to specific conditions surrounding each action' (LR: 78). We are most impressed by hearing of the actions of great men or of the conditions surrounding misfortune so that we can picture the state. In fact, Smith recommends that, after describing the state of mind prior to a distress and then identifying the circumstances that set

the distress in motion, the rhetor then draw the veil over the account to let the reader sympathetically reconstruct the psychological pain.

This ability of one human to reconstruct sympathetically the state of mind and personal condition of another is at the heart of Smith's moral philosophy developed in TMS. Sympathy there becomes the means by which one extends one's vision of life beyond the simply selfish to form understanding of, relations with, and obligations towards others. Similarly in the LR, sympathetic understanding provides the means of reaching out to create intersubjective meanings, not only in creating biographical portraits and accounts of actions, characters, and emotions, but also in projecting the meaning state of the rhetor and the interpretive processes and meaning reconstruction of the reader/audience.

### **Didactic rhetoric and schematic understanding**

Perhaps Smith's boldest leap towards understanding the reconstructive meaning states of the audience upon an associationist psychological foundation is his preference for Newtonian over Aristotelian presentation of didactic rhetoric.<sup>12</sup> He argues that humans desire to be able to put many details in mental order under a single principle or schematic system. In fact, humans find pleasure in being able to put many separate items into a single mental order, or as Smith puts it in associationist terms, 'the same chain' (LR: 134). Thus audiences are more likely to be impressed and, therefore, convinced by a presentation that begins with the statement of one or a few related principles and then expands upon many cases or further phenomena or rules as simply elaborations of the first principles (the Newtonian style) than by a presentation that proceeds by examining a series of separate cases then providing an explanation for each one or then inducing the general principle from the particulars (the Aristotelian).

Didactic rhetoric, according to Smith, is that which is aimed at conviction rather than simple persuasion. As such, it attempts to give a fair representation of all sides of the issue rather than just offer the one-sided partial presentation of the oratorical or persuasive rhetoric. Yet since Newtonian coherence is more likely to create conviction than the atomistic complexity of the Aristotelian style, and since the presentation of a coherent system will tend to push isolated details out of the picture, the juggernaut of Newtonian conviction is likely to overpower if not hide the cavils of an opposite view or an atomistically balanced discussion. Indeed Smith comments that facts that are questioned are not as memorable as those whose truth we are satisfied of, 'Now all proofs of this sort show that the matter is somewhat dubious; so that on the whole it would be more proper to narrate these facts without mentioning the doubt, than to bring in any long proof' (LR: 102). Thus conviction is best reached by keeping the argument simple, coherent and unconfused. Conviction is gained by foster-



ing a consistent and strong mind set or schema, in modern cognitive terms. Getting people to share the same schema allows the development of intersubjective realities and group conviction, group knowledge which can then form the basis of group action. Since sympathy itself is based on being able to reconstruct the mental state of others and then place that person within recognizable external conditions, establishing shared schematic knowledge allows greater degrees of sympathy, group understanding, group obligation, and communal coordination of relationships and actions.

Indeed, in discussing the history of deliberative rhetoric (which is more oratorical than didactic), Smith places the changing rhetoric within the changing economic conditions and class structure of Greek and Roman society, for those conditions frame the interests which the various rhetors had to appeal to in locally appropriate ways. (LR, chapters 25-27) Smith gives a kind of pre-Marxist situated historical economic reading of cultural productions and public ideology. The thoughts, appeals, and speech acts all occur within mental structures framed by the ambient social/economic circumstances, which locate both rhetor and audience within a shared cognitive universe that provides the basis for successful rhetorical discourse.

Because deliberative discourse is so situated, appealing to local interests without appearing too crassly to do so, deliberative rhetoric ought to appear plain and unartful. It engages the interested schematic perception of the local community without urging. Skilful arguments are placed so well within the mind set that they appear non-existent or self-evident.

In didactic rhetoric as well, the schematic coherence which makes an argument convincing also hides many things. The appeal of the coherent chain of reasoning, according to Smith can lead to preference for a system that is wrong, or not consistent with facts or other knowledge, over less coherent but empirically sensitive accounts. He claims that the general popularity of the work of Descartes is just such a case of the power of a coherent system to evoke conviction, even though it is wrong. Through an associationist analysis of rhetoric, Smith has developed observations and recommendations that sound almost as they might come from Thomas Kuhn or cognitive psychological schema theory.

When we put together all the pieces of Smith's rhetorical theory and his comments particularly on didactical discourse, we obtain a sceptical view of knowledge. Conviction seems driven by psychological needs as situated in social circumstances and communities, the same kinds of needs which rhetoric can appeal to. In local circumstances rhetoric provides for the meeting of psychologically individual persons over meanings passionately instantiated in texts that gain their power precisely from the force and coherence of the sentiments expressed. Shared knowledge, shared vision and shared action form the basis of community, and it is the task of rhetoric to create those forms of symbolic sharing. With this in mind, we now ought to remember that most of Smith's work to follow was

didactic with an aim of creating shared social visions for the sake of developing shared philosophical, moral, political and economic action.

What this means in terms of rhetorical action is that the rhetor through didactical discourse has the opportunity to create shared communal beliefs by asserting a scheme that speaks to the shared experiences and conditions of the audience community, so that they can find a common train of association that ties their experiences together. In doing so the rhetor need only respect the communal experiences that the audience will be aware of and have a need to reconcile. The rhetor need not attend any notion of absolute truth or correctness, but rather only the convincingness of the scheme.

### **THE HISTORY OF ASTRONOMY AND A PSYCHOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE**

The *History of Astronomy*, dating from 1758, takes this sceptical notion of knowledge formation one step further by saying the entire impulse to create theory or general knowledge is the psychological unease that comes from the unexpected, so that we constantly have a need to reconcile disparate experiences into chains of reasoning that make associations predictable. Surprise is one of the most distressing and shocking emotions, and we always have an impulse to domesticate it, first by wondering at the strange juxtapositions created by surprising conjunctions and then by developing an account that reconciles the association in some common-sense way. The correctness of the account does not matter as long as it creates a satisfying set of associations. Obviously the more ideas that can be brought together under a single train of associations, the more satisfying, or beautiful, or convincing that train of associations or idea is. The intellectual progress of astronomy, Smith presents as a series of attempts to reconcile more and more experiences under a satisfying account. Newton, at the end of Smith's story, has provided such a satisfying account that seems to explain so many of our experiences so satisfactorily under a coherent framework that we are tempted to believe that it indeed reaches truth, although Smith retains a sceptical irony about ever knowing theoretical truth, which after all is driven by our psychological need rather than our wisdom.

[Newton's] system, however, now prevails over all opposition, and has advanced to the acquisition of the most universal empire that was ever established in philosophy. His principles, it must be acknowledged, have a degree of firmness and solidity that we should look for in vain in any other system. The most skeptical cannot avoid feeling this. . . . And even we, while we have been endeavouring to represent all philosophical systems as mere inventions of the imagination, to connect together the otherwise disjointed and discordant

revisions in the second and the sixth). Here I wish to make only a few general and fragmentary observations relevant to the current argument.

First the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* begins, as all have noticed, from the basis of an idiosyncratic individuality of consciousness, driven by self-centred desires and perceptions – a Lockian Humean creature.<sup>15</sup> But sympathy allows an extension of vision to comprehend the existence, passions and sentiments of others, forming the basis of relationships.<sup>16</sup>

Second, the device of the impartial spectator allows one to step outside one's narrowest interests in perceiving others' actions and sentiments, but even more in defining personal actions that would seem meritorious to anyone who was fully informed, yet disinterested. This is the self from which moral virtue develops – that is a sense of communal consciousness, obligation, and responsibility as epitomized in the four virtues Smith develops in the sixth edition, virtues that seem to describe the role of a community elder: prudence, justice, benevolence, and self-command.

The more one cultivates these virtues, the broader one's sympathies become and the less one becomes attached to one's prideful concepts of oneself, one's immediate relations, or one's country. One reconstructs oneself morally to participate in the general condition of humanity as broadly as circumstances allow. One also takes on increasing responsibility for regulating and guiding the community, again as broadly conceived as circumstances allow. However, in carrying out that obligation to work for the widest security, justice, and happiness one must contain one's prideful love of one's own system and must also be respectful of the powers, passions, interests, and prejudices that exist among others. One recognizes that one is part of a complex world composed of many consciousnesses that cannot be uprooted by the schemes of any one person, no matter how greatly one esteems one's own vision of how things ought to be. Smith thus proposes a politics of gentle suasion, doing no more than preservation of social order will allow.

The man whose public spirit is prompted altogether by humanity and benevolence, will respect the established powers and privileges even of individuals, and still more those of the great orders and societies, into which the state is divided. When he cannot establish the right, he will not disdain to ameliorate the wrong; but like Solon, when he cannot establish the best system of laws, he will endeavour to establish the best that the people can bear.

(TMS 233)

### **Multiplicity, the invisible hand, and the taste for authoritarian order**

Third, Smith's distaste for a domineering system and respect for the necessity of maintaining social order through whatever existing beliefs and accom-

phenomena of nature, have insensibly been drawn in, to make use of language expressing the connecting principles of this one, as if they were the real chains which Nature makes use of to bind together her several operations.

(EPS: 104–5)

It is the philosopher's role to create those ideas that draw experiences together and provide us psychological ease. Philosophers, in modern psychological terms, are those people who solve the communal puzzles posed by the problems of our cognitive dissonance. By doing so, they not only relieve the minds of individuals, they relieve the social disorders that follow on confusion and disorientation. Early in Smith's discussion he mentions the disruptive impact of surprising situations and unpredictable events on people, culminating in an account of the panic fear that sets upon an army when 'they are excited by the sudden apprehension of unexpected danger' (EPS: 35). The philosopher, by providing society with satisfying accounts, domesticates our confusions and wonder within a coherent and familiar belief system which then can provide the basis of communal interpretation, coordination, and cooperation. Philosophic accounts calm the collective mind and allow social order to ensue. Philosophic history is the succession of ideas upon which our minds rest in response to the changing information which we have to juggle or associate (changing from the amount of information available, from our changing socio-political-economic conditions and from inventions of ideas that form part of our mental and social landscape). Newton, by implication, has settled much of the unease of Smith and his contemporaries about the cosmos and its operation, so has done a great social service in stilling individual fears and suppressing the more bizarre and upsetting accounts of fanatical religions.<sup>13</sup>

To operationalize these issues in Smith's life, we only need to remember again that Smith's works in addition to being didactic can also be considered philosophical, providing coherent accounts of the troubling and confusing subjects of morality, government, and economic relations, all of which were going through surprising changes in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Smith's accounts attempt to provide a basis for shared and stable beliefs in these areas. Certainly in economics he seems to have achieved a high degree of success in this.

#### **FROM PSYCHOLOGY TO SOCIETY: *THE THEORY OF MORAL SENTIMENTS***

There is much existing commentary on the 1759 work *Theory of Moral Sentiments*<sup>14</sup> (reissued in six editions in Smith's lifetime, including major

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modations that have made it possible means that he cannot rely on the visions and plans of the leaders of statecraft to keep society together. It is the idea of the invisible hand, first introduced in this work, that makes social order possible and not the concept of system from the top.

But the idea of invisible hand as introduced here is not quite as we know it. It is not the mutual acquisitiveness of entrepreneurial economic atoms in a free market that generates general prosperity; it is rather the passion of individuals for system, for order, for perfection of design, that motivates individuals (each in their own way, according to the quirks and tastes of their character) to act beyond their simple needs for food and shelter, the basic provisions of life. The desire to create a better machine, the better collection, the greater fortune, or the more powerful army, generates activity that spreads wealth, creates cooperative action, and instigates prosperity that gets shared with all elements of society. This general love of perfection of system does realize its desires in economic activity, but it is not economic at its origin.

Yet the desire for system and its perfection is dangerous if contained only in the hands of one or a few. It is the universal taste for perfection that plays one off against each other and allows us to receive the benefits of love of our own systems while not having to pay the costs of all being subordinate to the desires of one or a few. So the virtuous legislator tolerates and even appreciates the activities of others. Indeed, in discussing the man of virtue in comparison to the man of pride, Smith makes much of the ability not only to tolerate, but to seek interchange with one's peers and others.

Smith's desire for multiplicity of systems tempering each other in competition and coordination, however, is resisted by the tendencies of humans to respect, admire, and follow their social superiors, even when superiority is simply a matter of position or wealth. As Smith discusses here and in LJ, people attribute greater perfection of system and order to those they imagine socially superior to them, even when individuals have no specific interest in the fate of those superiors. That is, the peasant living off subsistence of the land, totally independent of the good will or economic power of the great lord will still subordinate his thought and actions to the social hierarchy. Love of system thus can be transposed into class respect and love of authority, militating against that proliferation of self-motivated systems that creates a teeming and multiply active society. This respect for authority in fact becomes one of the great resistances to social change, and individuals must be encouraged gently to recognize their own self interests, weaning themselves from traditional institutions of power, while not threatening the social order transitionally maintained through those institutions.

**Smith as the philosophic legislator**

In Smith's portrait of the goals of the life of virtue we can readily see a self-referential plan for his own life and aims in creating convincing accounts of social order, gently persuading others to see the basis for psychologically and selfishly satisfying relations with each other and then educating them into broader sympathies to see enlightened self-interest in the common life of the society. Moreover, in this work, he locates the kind of work carried out by the man of virtue as largely legislative, concerning the regulation and ordering of society. Further, he locates the working out of each individual's passion for perfection largely to occur within the economic sphere, for financial gain seems to provide the means to buy the more perfect watch, collect the larger fortune, live in the more magnificent house. Thus we see the justification for his turning his attention to jurisprudence and political economy as crucial topics for society, as well as his motivation for intervening as a philosopher within those two closely related spheres, in fulfilment of his role as a man of virtue.

Smith's accomplishment seems located directly in the middle of the problem of political philosophy since the advent of the Renaissance (see Dumont 1977; Hirschman 1977): how to establish social order outside traditional institutions of hierarchical power with people who are neither fully rational nor fully good, but rather moved by passions and self interest. Thinkers like Machiavelli, Mandeville and Montesquieu suggested playing the various passions and interests against each other to find a configuration of passions or interests that are socially integrating in their consequences. Others like Hobbes and Locke proposed compact theories, which depended both on coercion and general dispassionate human constancy in supporting the compact. Smith is moving towards a view of elevating the passion for perfection (later in WN translated into the passion for self-improvement, and then reduced to the passion for wealth) as dominating over all other passions and forming the basis for self-interest to be pursued at the level of economics. Each person's passion is met and contained by contact with the passions of others in society. This channelling of the individual's passion and setting it against the parallel passions of others creates a self-regulating and self-motivating mechanism for social integration. It is the role of the benevolent and just man of virtue to help this along by appropriate legislation, but not by imposing it (in Hobbesian fashion) against the taste of unruly humans.

**LAW AS THE INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL ORDER, BUT  
ECONOMICS AS ITS MACHINE**

The *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, developed over the same years as the lectures that led to the TMS, turn explicitly to the science of the legislator to foster

order within the community through law. These lectures, however, also identify economic interests as drawing people together in relation to one another and the need for the ordering of institutions of government to protect and promote economic transactions.

In LJ Smith presents civil society as a series of inventions that improve the conditions of individuals and the community. For Smith, human existence in itself is fundamentally neither economic nor political, but the desire to improve one's condition and the psychological taste for perfection of order, draw one into relation with others. Those relations, achieved through persuasion that exchange or cooperation is of mutual benefit, are cemented through civil jurisprudence, the institution of which is also a matter of persuasion. Thus persuasion or rhetoric is at the heart of human relations and civil order, all of which are activities of symbolic exchange.

In Smith's state of nature where each has subsistence by personal means, there is neither exchange nor inequality, so no need exists for civil mechanisms of exchange nor protection from crime (driven primarily by economic inequality). Smith states baldly that government came into being and exists to protect wealth and the interests of the wealthy, which are always under threat from those who envy the greater goods of the wealthy: 'Till there be property there can be no government, the very end of which is to secure wealth, and to defend the rich from the poor' (LJ: 401).

That inequality comes about through the invention of barter, division of labour, then money as a universal means of symbolic exchange. Aggregation of money then becomes exchangeable and equivalent to all other forms of goods and power. Division of labour and resulting inequalities of wealth lead in turn to different experiences, motives and paths of individual development, which then become self-reinforcing class divisions, with the leisured and wealthy garnering larger psychological and experiential resources as well as economic. The rich get richer because they lead the lives of the rich. In addition, the respect for authority helps maintain and reinforce divisions and social order as social hierarchy emerges.

A few further points are worth noting for the current argument. We can see how deeply economics are at the heart of civil order for Smith by examining his analysis of the parts of government: justice, police, revenue and arms. The latter two are simply instrumental, in providing the means for the operations of state and protecting the state from foreign threats driven by envy of the nation's wealth. Of the former two, 'the object of justice is the security from injury' (LJ: 398), which injury Smith sees largely as economically driven. Police (or what we might now call public policy) are cheapness of commodities, public security (police in the modern sense) and cleanliness (sanitation, water, etc.). The latter two Smith sees as trivial, with only the cheapness of goods, that is the overall affluence of the nations or the ability of citizens to share in goods and services, being worth significant attention. Thus government primarily protects wealth and

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establishes policies that foster new wealth, for these are what bind the individuals into civil relation.

This civil relation fosters the division of labour, which is the primary means of increasing wealth (or creating cheapness of goods). The division of labour both increases general wealth and establishes distinctions in property, family prominence, mental and physical abilities – all those things Smith says are respected as the sources of authority, except for age. Moreover, at the top of the hierarchy as being of highest social utility are philosophers – in their role as inventors. Because they create coherent accounts or reliable trains of associations, they are in a position to invent new arrangements of physical machinery, of matter, of human relations, or of political order. As Smith comments in discussing the progress of inventions:

Some miserable slave who had perhaps been employed for a long time in grinding corn between two stones, probably first found out the method of supporting the upper stone by a spindle. A miln wright perhaps found out the way of turning the spindle with the hand. But he who contrived that the outer wheel should go by water was a philosopher, whose business it is to do nothing, but observe everything. They must have extensive views of things, who, as in this case, bring in the assistance of new powers not formerly applied. Whether he was an artizan, or whatever he was who first executed this, he must have been a philosopher. Fire machines [steam engines], wind and water milns were the inventions of philosophers, whose dexterity too is increased by a division of labour. They all divide themselves, according to the different branches, into the mechanical, moral, political, chymical philosophers. Thus we have shewn how the quantity of labour is increased by machines.

(LJ: 492)

### Philosophy and persuasion

Throughout his career Smith wondered what it was that philosophers (like himself) did. He earlier noted that they create chains of reasoning that soothe the collective mind and create the basis for social order in convincing shared belief. Now he argues they invent new machines that advance the economy, and, therefore, they generate social rewards and commitment for participation in society. Moral and political philosophers invent moral and political machines, just as mechanical philosophers do mechanical machines.

Philosophers – needing the highest cognitive development and most leisure for reflection while producing the most socially useful inventions – appear late in the evolution of the division of labour and social complexity,



are high on the hierarchy of authority and social power, and have a claim to the social resources that allow them to produce their goods for society. Moreover, this conception of philosopher creates an even stronger conjunction between Smith's man of virtue, the statesman and legislator, and the philosopher, with consequences for Smith's understanding of his own writing and social role.

If philosophy is near the pinnacle of the division of labour, for Smith persuasion is at its basis, for persuasion is what makes barter possible. One person must create in another an association between a good controlled by the first person and the second person's desire for order. The first must make that association so strong as to elicit an exchange at terms perceived as favourable to both. Division of labour and specialization of production are based on the possibility of exchange to meet our needs through the labour of others. Persuasion runs throughout this world of exchange and division; indeed, the need becomes more intense the further the realms of production are divided, for we have to evoke desire across more greatly divided boundaries. One must convince another to exchange not only sheep for cows, but money for goats, or legal advice for agriculturally earned dollars. We have to convince each other of increasingly arcane, complex, and developed productions, including productions of economic and political systems. Indeed, Smith, as a philosopher and inventor of political and moral machinery, must work very hard at persuading us be convinced of those systems he is inventing so that we will think it in our interest to participate in them. He must convince those in political power, leaders of parliamentary parties, who must then convince their memberships and their constituencies.

Not only is persuasion necessary to carry forward the kinds of cooperations required by the division of labour, the failure of persuasion leads to social ruptures as we no longer find common cause with our neighbour and only psychological disease at their contradiction of our perception and conception. As Smith comments,

Thus we have shewn that different genius is not the foundation of this disposition to barter which is the cause of the division of labour. The real foundation of it is that principle to persuade which so much prevails in human nature. When any arguments are offered to persuade, it is always expected that they should have their proper effect. If a person asserts anything about the moon, tho' it should not be true, he will feel a kind of uneasiness in being contradicted, and would be very glad that the person he is endeavouring to persuade should be of the same way of thinking of himself. *We ought then mainly to cultivate the power of persuasion, and indeed we do so without intending it. Since a whole life is spent in the exercise of it, a ready method of bargaining with each other must undoubtedly be attained.* As was

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before observed, no animal can do this but by gaining the favour of those whom they would persuade. Sometimes, indeed, animals seem to act in concert, but there never is anything like bargain among them. Monkeys, when they rob a garden, throw the fruit from one to another, till they deposit it in the hoard, but there is always a scramble about the division of the booty, and usually some of them are killed.

(LJ: 493-4, emphasis added)

These are the observations of someone who has thought hard and long about persuasion and someone who views human interaction primarily in terms of symbolic activity, with the relationships dependent on successful symbolic conjunctions resulting in mutual agreements. Moreover, if we put this together with his comments in Chapter II.8 of LJ on the origin of money (later repeated in the WN), where money becomes a symbolic repository of material value, with the added suasive effect of interchangeability, fairness of measure, and consistency of value, we see the continuity between language and finance as invented symbolic systems that become the meeting point of human interchange. Money is a kind of language, through which value is attributed and transactions completed – money talks, perhaps with an immediacy that only the more socially advantaged have the intellectual and economic means to rise above. Such Marxist reflections not only have their roots in Smith, but in fact form the basis of the exchange system Smith is heading for as the basis of social order – the project which he brings to a head and persuades us of in WN.

## THE RHETORICAL ACTION OF THE *WEALTH OF NATIONS*

WN carries forward Smith's construction of the universe, particularly in the economic sphere, but my purpose here is not to provide additional exegesis of the vision presented there, for that vision has been traversed many times from many directions. Rather, I wish only to point out a few of the rhetorical strategies and aims carried out in presenting that vision. It is the vision ultimately that he wants us drawn into, and for which he wants legislators to adopt appropriate free market governmental policies. This is not to say that market activities have not occurred prior to Smith's writing or prior to legislation fostering the market. Indeed, Smith wants to present market activities as the natural condition of humankind inevitably leading to economic development despite inappropriate government policies. But, like Marx, he wants us all to help the inevitable forces of economic history along by enlisting us and governments into his vision and realm of activity. To do so, he wants to gather previously disparate and less than fully legitimated behaviours and place them under the banner of a coherent, fully legitimated, natural seeming way of life.

His ideas of how to draw us into that vision are themselves based on his own developing vision of human action and symbolic intersubjectivity as I have been suggesting throughout this chapter. His rhetorical action may be said to be located precisely within his own universe. In that universe humans are moved by visions built on coherent principles in Newtonian fashion, not troubled by contradictions or untoward complications.

Therefore, he argues in a Newtonian fashion, presenting all as flowing from a single principle. After a brief summary preface, the book begins with an exposition of the division of labour which is presented as the foundation of all economy. Although he made much of the division of labour in the lectures on jurisprudence, only here does he make it the first and organizing principle. He suppresses the role of persuasion and also subordinates the role of barter, although both he had considered prior to division of labour in earlier work. Moreover, reversing the presentation of LJ, he discusses government only as an afterthought in the last part of WN, and only under the heading of revenue and what its justifications are. That is, government here is only what removes money from the economy and only for economically justified activities. No questions of personal social order are considered prior to the issue of economy. Complications of this issue are reserved to much later in the work, as when Smith in Part II, Chapter 3 points out that the desire for wealth is only a secondary reduction of the more general desire to better one's condition. 'An augmentation of fortune is the means by which the greater part of men propose and wish to better their condition. It is the means most vulgar and most obvious' (WN: 363). Similarly, his reservations about the behaviour of those who aggregate money in the form of capital are withheld until he comes to concrete analysis of the limited power of labour to protect its interests and the ability of different classes to see national interests through their own interests. It is no surprise that these complications and reservations still remain hidden to the modern popular conception of the book and even to the standard reading of many modern economists concerned only with the machinery – the flow of goods, services and capital. These hints of complications are well hidden until the system has been set in motion, and readers have been drawn into an entrancing view of well-oiled mechanisms by which the system is said to work.

#### A rhetorical outline of WN

Smith's teeming world of economic activity is presented as historically arising out of a simple world of subsistence production, leading to barter, then money, then modern economies. All alternative conceptions of economic development and relations, even though they may have been influential in the construction of economies, have been left out at this point. They