

Propriety and Prosperity: New Studies on the Philosophy of Adam Smith. David F. Hardwick and Leslie Marsh (Editors). New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 302 pages, \$115.00 hardcover.

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I recently reviewed the literature on Adam Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment (Paganelli, 2015). What I found is that Adam Smith is very much alive and studied but in ways different from the past. Smith is engaged in current debates not just in historical ones. Scholars wish to understand what Smith said to his contemporaries but also, and especially, what he can tell us today. Smith's ability to converse with us today is also reflected in his ability to converse with different audiences. His background, education, and interests covered most of the spectrum of knowledge. So today he can have something to say to everyone, well, to many at least.

Propriety and Prosperity: New Studies on the Philosophy of Adam Smith, edited by David F. Hardwick and Leslie Marsh, is an example of this recent trend. The editors are based in a medical school and claimed to be interested in Smith because they are actively involved in science, markets, and interactions with philanthropic institutions as well as the government, and in issues related to complexity, emerging orders, distributed knowledge, institutional design and bounded rationality (p. 2).

Therefore the volume presents a slightly different picture of Smith than the one a "regular" Smith scholar would expect. While the depth is at times questionable, the breadth is definitely a strong point of the Smith presented in this book. The Smith we find in this volume is a Smith who can comfortably talk to his contemporary Scottish philosophers (Gordon Graham), to his French immediate predecessors and contemporaries (Laurent Dobuzinskis), to his French contemporary translators such as Sophie de Grouchy (Spyridon Tegos), as well as to today's scholars interested in, say, trust and trustworthiness in the field of behavioral experiments (Roger Frantz), or in self-deceit and in cognitive biases (Jonathan Wight), or to scholars interested in understanding sympathy and empathy and their differences (Joshua Rust as well as Gloria Zuniga y Postigo), or sensory perception (Brian Glenney).

The Smith we find in this volume is also a Smith that lets us use different styles of conversation. On the one hand, Jack Weinstein uses his personal experience with his dog to show that Smith's claim that humans behave differently from other animals does not hold today. On the other hand, Eugene Heath uses a meticulous and superb scholarly analysis of the meaning of metaphors, both in Smith and in general, to understand the meaning of "the invisible hand." Similarly, this Smith is able to sustain a conversation on the beaten paths of the "Adam Smith Problem" (Lauren Hall) as well as on the uses and abuses of the "invisible hand" (Gavin Kennedy).

The last essay of this collection, in my view, is the scholarly work that most captures, even if possibly unintendedly, the spirit of the book and the image of Smith that emerges from it. Craig Smith situates Adam Smith in his time, carefully dissects him, and sees what can and what cannot be used in today's context without subjecting poor old Adam to unnecessary and uncalled for violence. Craig Smith uses the idea of social or distributive justice to show how we too easily want Adam Smith to agree with us, so we too often do not listen carefully to what he is saying. Adam Smith does not talk about social justice so asking him about it is asking him the wrong question. For us, social justice is a sort of combination of justice, benevolence, and "police," but for Adam Smith justice, benevolence, and police are three separate and non-compatible things. Justice is a necessary component of society and emerges from resentment. Benevolence is not necessary for society. It is just a nice ornament of it, and it arises from our humanity, not from our resentment. Policies emerge from expediencies, not from resentment, not from humanity. Policies are enforced coercively, while justice takes the form of rules, and benevolence is voluntary. Talking about distributive justice in (or with) Adam Smith may therefore be misleading unless we are willing and able to listen carefully to what he is saying.

The volume, through its strengths and weaknesses, is in this sense a contribution for Smith experts and non-experts alike: it tells us that we can still comfortably engage in conversations with Adam Smith. But like in any conversation, we need to listen carefully to our interlocutor.

Reference

- Paganelli, M. P. (2015). Recent engagements with Adam Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment. *History of Political Economy*, 47, 363–394.