

# Gew gaws, baubles, frivolous objects, and trinkets

## Adam Smith (and Cugoano) on slavery

Aaron Garrett

### Introduction

Adam Smith sought to explain the persistence of slavery as an institution in *Wealth of Nations* and *Lectures on Jurisprudence*. In order to accomplish this he also drew on arguments he had developed in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. The result was a sophisticated explanation which bridged economic, psychological, and moral considerations. After presenting Smith’s explanation I will consider a discussion of the moral wrong of slavery in Ottobah Cugoano, the author of the incisive criticism of the slave trade *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (1787). I will suggest that Cugoano’s account of what is morally wrong in slavery shows an important lacuna in Smith’s views.

### Smith on Slavery

In both LJ and WN, Smith developed David Hume’s brief “economic argument” presented in the “Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations”:

I shall add, that, from the experience of our planters, slavery is as little advantageous to the master as to the slave, wherever hired servants can be procured. A man is obliged to cloath and feed his slave; and he does no more for his servant: The price of the first purchase is, therefore, so much loss to him: not to mention, that the fear of punishment will never draw so much labour from a slave, as the dread of being turned off and not getting another service, will from a freeman. (PA 16n19; Hume (1987), 389-90).]

Hume’s invocation “from the experience of our planters” suggests that he is taking his evidence from a standard slave apologist trope: that slavery is not profitable and is a service rendered by kind masters to govern child-like natural slaves.<sup>1</sup> Smith clearly does not think that modern slavery is a service to enslaved

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<sup>1</sup>See Shanafelt’s discussion of James Tobin’s presentation of this view and Olaudah Equiano’s criticisms of it (Shanafelt (2021), 29-30). See also Jorati (2023), 3.7 and Lu-Adler (2022), 264

persons for reasons to be discussed shortly,<sup>2</sup> but he agreed with Hume that slavery is imprudent and presents Hume's local claim as a general law:

It appears, accordingly, from the experience of all ages and nations, I believe, that the work done by freemen comes cheaper in the end than that performed by slaves. (Smith (1976a) I.viii.41)

The problem is in squaring this general rule – the empirical and tentative character of which is underscored by “it appears” and “I believe” -- with a variety of other commitments that Smith holds, but which appear to be in conflict with it.

First, Smith acknowledged that “the profits of a sugar-plantation in any of our West Indies colonies are generally much greater than those of any other cultivation that is known either in Europe or America” (Smith (1975), 3.2.10). If the West Indian plantations, which Smith picks out as the cruelest modern versions of enslaved labor, are more profitable than manufacturers employing free labor in Europe and America, how can it be held that the work done by freemen comes cheaper in the end than that performed by slaves?

Second, like his Glasgow predecessors Gershom Carmichael and Francis Hutcheson, Smith considered slavery to be deeply immoral.<sup>3</sup> That Smith took slavery to be a complete violation of natural rights can be seen by the one to one correspondence between each way he characterizes the wrongs of slavery and the violation of fundamental natural rights claim presented at the beginning of his lectures.<sup>4</sup> Rights can “all be reduced to the first’ class of those respecting his

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on Kant and Tobin.

<sup>2</sup>“It is evident that the state of slavery must be very unhappy to the slave himself. This I need hardly prove, tho some writers have called it in question” (Smith (1978), A iii.111).

<sup>3</sup>Smith's most extensive discussion of slavery is in the *Lecture on Jurisprudence* (LJ). LJ is structured along the lines of Francis Hutcheson's lecture course, which Smith attended. Hutcheson derived some structure of his lectures from his predecessor Gershom Carmichael who in turn lectured on Samuel Pufendorf's *De Officiis*. The relation between master and slave, father and children, and husband and wife were for Pufendorf and his predecessors' fundamental natural offices or roles with duties and obligations. As such slavery was a subject that was expected to be treated in the context of natural law lectures. Both Hutcheson and Carmichael greatly restricted Samuel Pufendorf's and Hugo Grotius's justifications of slavery. Both held that “the children of slaves of any sort are born free” (Hutcheson (2007), III.III.iii.7; Carmichael (2002) 143-4). Both saw claims to just enslavement as being made by victors in war to attempt to justify unjust actions towards civilians (Hutcheson (2007), III.III.iii.5, Carmichael (2002) 141-2). Carmichael concludes his discussion “I have treated the matter of these last three sections at some length because this usurped right of *owning* slaves like cattle, as it existed among the ancients, is exercised today by men who profess to be Christians . . . I am deeply convinced that its existence, to use the apt expression of Titius, is a *sure sign of the death of sociability*.” (Carmichael (2002), 143-4)

<sup>4</sup>He adds that the ability to marry is also violated in modern slavery (Smith (1978) A iii.127) which can be reduced to the “first class” (Smith (1978) A i.13) of violation of natural rights. The only rights violation which is not explicitly addressed is reputation, which I take it is also part of slavery. Haakonssen worries about potential conflicts between rights to property and rights to liberty (Haakonssen 1981, 142). And Salter worries about degrees of injury (Salter (1996), 236). But this does not seem a serious problem to me insofar as Smith defines slavery as a wholesale and total rights violation.

person; the right to free commerce, and the right to freedom in marriage, etc. when infringed are all evidently incroachments on the right one has to the free use of his person and in a word to do what he has a mind when it does not prove detrimental to any other person” (Smith (1978) A i.13). Men qua men can be injured in their persons, their body and life, and in their reputations and estates ( Smith (1978) A i.12).<sup>5</sup> Enslavement is consequently a complete violation of fundamental natural rights, duties of justice, and other duties following from those rights insofar as it is an institution by which a person or persons totally domineers another person or person’s life, liberty, and any and all goods they may produce or possess. By extension as it produces the most extensive injury it is the most unjust state and institution.

Like Hutcheson, Smith takes rights in connection with justice to entail an assessment by an impartial spectator, i.e. that capacity developed in each moral person to inhabit a standpoint from which to make impartial moral judgments.<sup>6</sup> When I witness an injury I am brought to sympathize with the party whose rights are violated by adopting the perspective of the impartial spectator. Given that Smith’s apparent optimism about our capacity to morally improve in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and given that we seek to punish all sorts of other lesser harms are punished, how does such gross immorality persist ?

Third, one might think that slavery would be more cruel in “barbarous” societies and more temperate in “polite societies”. Smith thinks that this is the case for the treatment of wives by their husbands and children by their parents. Husbands treat their wives more as equals in polite society, and fathers are less brutal to their sons and daughters. But this is not the case with slavery. Slavery was most brutal in the Roman Empire and in the contemporary West Indies. Why is slavery so anomalous in going against this civilizing tendency?<sup>7</sup>

In sum then slavery is imprudent according to the general rule, wholly immoral according to Smith’s account of natural rights, and historically anomalous in comparison with other institutions of unequal power. Yet it is also ubiquitous and persistent. How and why does it persist?

Smith’s response is a multi-causal analysis which involves (at least) six distinct components: 1) the “love of domination and authority” or “love to domineer” which “may almost be said to be natural to mankind” (Smith (1978), B 134); 2) custom; 3) the blocking of sympathy through separating human beings into

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<sup>5</sup>Smith does not explain what justifies these as natural rights for him. On my view natural rights are those rights and which regardless of circumstance entail claims to justice due to injury which are recognized by an impartial spectator. They warrant those actions which do not cause injury to other persons. See Haakonssen (1981) and Garrett and Hanley (2015) for more discussion.

<sup>6</sup>There is some disagreement about how seriously to take Smith’s discussions of natural rights. What seems clear is however one understands the wrong of slavery, it is a fundamental wrong for Smith.

<sup>7</sup>I will not discuss the Roman case but I think it would need a somewhat different explanation due to the fact that it was not a capitalist economy and stoked by Roman nationalism and war.

distinct unequal groups; 4) the prudential desire of those who have enslaved persons to maintain (and expand) their enslaved persons; 5) the ability to leverage political structures to do this; 6) the “lawless” origins of New World enslavement (which as far as I know has never been discussed in connection with Smith). 6) provides a transition to discussing Cugoano.

## The love of domineering

The “love of domination and tyrannizing” (1) which “may almost be said to be natural to mankind” (Smith (1978), B 134) is central to Smith’s explanation of slavery. But as an explanation it is worrying for two reasons.

First it is too particular. Smith appears to be positing an explanatory primitive or quirk in our psychology<sup>8</sup> as a special explanation to a serious problem. Slavery is bad, slavery persists, therefore there must be a special permanent drive in us to enslave. As I shall argue the “love of domination and authority” does pivotal work in Smith’s account beyond explaining slavery and shows connections between different areas of human science. Consequently it is a more general explanation.

Second it is too general. Insofar as it pushes off the wrong of slavery as a quirk or “an ontological flaw in the make up of humans” (Pack (1996), 255) as opposed to allowing that the wrong of modern slavery is quite specific and connected with the rise of modern extractive mercantilist colonialism. But I will suggest the desire for dominion and authority in fact does distinctively connect modern slavery to modern mercantilism.

What is the “love of domination and authority”? Following Grotius, Pufendorf, and many others, Smith treats slavery in LJ as one of “3 different relations in which the members of a family may stand [in] to one another” (Smith (1978), A III.1) that belongs to the larger genus of servitude. Unlike his predecessors, Smith presents the historical transformation in slavery from an institution connected with the family to large-scale plantations in Rome and the West Indies. As noted in the previous section the power of father over child and husband over wife (Smith (1978), A III.78-87, B 130) tended to be weaker in the Roman Empire and in European commercial society.<sup>9</sup> But slavery tends to be crueller in polite, commercial society than in more barbarous societies (Pack 1996, 257).

This suggests something specific to slavery which blocks amelioration. Smith initially introduces the term “slave” as a general term to describe the conditions

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<sup>8</sup>See Shanafelt 2022. Quirks can do a great deal of explanatory work for Smith insofar as they often have unforeseen consequences. For example, the depopulation of Europe following the plague was a historical quirk but it was crucial to the post-feudal transformation of Europe. Relatedly Paul Sagar describes the way in which the motivation to enrich oneself is driven not by need but by our aesthetic appreciation of trinkets as a “quirk” (Sagar (2022), 132).

<sup>9</sup>Albeit with numerous important contingent exceptions due to particular legal codes, church restrictions on the wife’s ability to initiate divorce, etc.

of serfs and women in a wide range of societies. Smith then more narrowly defines slavery as involving 1) the power of life and death; 2) the power to dispose of the liberty of the enslaved person however the master chooses including transferring the enslaved person to a new master; and 3) the exclusive rights to whatever the enslaved person produces or uses (Smith (1978), A III.90-91). Familial relations are sometimes mitigated by other relatives – brother, mother – since they do not exclude these other relations. But there is no one internal to the larger family who mitigates brutality to servants much the less enslaved persons (Smith (1978), A III.89). The arbitrariness and exclusivity of power over another that constitutes slavery rules out relations which offset it.

The “love of domination and tyrannizing” is the source of this arbitrariness and exclusivity. From the word “tyrannizing” one might think that Smith has in mind a brute desire to harm others. But the love of domineering is any desire to render others lower than oneself and incapable of resistance:

yet the love of domination and authority and the pleasure men take in having every (thing) done by their express orders, rather than to condescend to bargain and treat with those whom they look upon as their inferiors and are inclined to use in a haughty way; this love of domination and tyrannizing, I say, will make it impossible for the slaves in a free country ever to recover their liberty. (Smith (1978), A III.114)

The love of domination and authority over others which I am afraid is natural to mankind, a certain desire of having others below one, and the pleasure it gives one to have some persons whom he can order to do his work rather than be obliged to persuade others to bargain with him, will forever hinder this from taking place. (Smith (1978), A III.130)

In WN tyrannizing drops entirely out and the focus is on “to domineer”:

The pride of man makes him love to domineer, and nothing mortifies him so much as to be obliged to condescend to persuade his inferiors. Wherever the law allows it, and the nature of the work can afford it, therefore, he will generally prefer the service of slaves to that of freemen. (Smith (1976a) III.ii.10)

In Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* Usbek’s favorite Roxanna is as much his slave as his other wives who he treats harshly. Similarly on my view although Smith’s love of domineering often takes the form of brutal tyrannizing, the description in WN is his considered view.

Domineering and its cognates are exceedingly rare in TMS, LJ, and WN. As far as I know domineering occurs in only one other context. Prior to Smith’s presentation of the economic argument against slavery in “Of the Wages of Labour” (I.viii), Smith discusses circumstances “where the funds destined for the maintenance of labour were sensibly decaying” and suggest that this is disastrous

for the working poor or “lowest class” leading to “want, famine, and mortality” (Smith (1976a) I.viii.26). Smith notes that:

The difference between the genius of the British constitution which protects and governs North America, and that of the mercantile company which oppresses and domineers in the East Indies, cannot perhaps be better illustrated than by the different state of those countries.

Smith then offers a general rule:

“the liberal reward of labour . . . is the natural symptom of increasing national wealth. The scanty maintenance of the labouring poor, on the other hand, is the natural symptom that things are at a stand, and their starving condition that they are going fast backwards” (Smith (1976a) I.viii.26).

This is an early pivotal moment in Smith’s larger argument in WN. Free trade when guided by stable laws leads, *ceteris paribus*, to relative prosperity for the nation and poor and bad or no laws lead to poverty. Smith describes the East India company as *domineering*, the word which he used to characterize the natural propensity which promotes slavery despite its imprudence.

In both cases Smith seems to have in mind “having every (thing) done by their express orders, rather than to condescend to bargain and treat with those whom they look upon as their inferiors and are inclined to use in a haughty way”. In the case of the joint-stock company this is the desire of the merchants and shareholders who constitute the company to be able to trade without interference through express order with no bargaining.<sup>10</sup> In the case of the slaveholder this is the desire to have laborers who must acquiesce to every demand.<sup>11</sup>

Smith notes that the man of systems “cannot suffer the smallest deviation from any part of it. He goes on to establish it completely and in all its parts, without any regard either to the great interests, or to the strong prejudices which may oppose it” (Smith (1976b) VI.ii.2.17). This suggests that love of domineering also motivates the “man of system” in addition to the aesthetic pleasure arising from governing a well-functioning whole.<sup>12</sup> And it motivates the “rustic hospitality” (Smith (1976a) III.iv.12) and hangers on of feudal barons. In each case – the mercantilist, the man of system, the slaveholder, and also the pre-

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<sup>10</sup>For an excellent discussion of the centrality of the worry about joint-stock companies to Smith see Muthu (2008).

<sup>11</sup>Later in the same section when discussing the psychology of employers of servants and laborers Smith notes “masters of all sorts . . . make better bargains with their servants in dear rather than in cheap years and find them more humble and dependent in the former than in the latter” and “naturally. . . commend the former as more favorable to industry (Smith (1976a) I.viii.48.) By “dear” means when goods are scarce, by “cheap” when goods are plentiful. The imprudent preference for hiring labor in dear years belongs to the same genus of psychological motivation as the joint-stock company and the slaveholder.

<sup>12</sup>Conversely slave apologists such as George Fitzhugh stressed the beautiful aesthetic wholes of an organic well-ordered system.

modern patriarch – the desire to have others fall in line and directly follow their commands sometimes gives rise to imprudent conduct. Since in these different cases prudence is countered by the motivation to domineer, Smith is providing a general explanation, and not just resting his analysis on a psychological quirk.

This is not to suggest that Smith takes these different types of domineering to be morally on par. Mercantilists and the man of systems each violate one category of natural right and in a less injurious manner. But it does not follow that since slavery is least moral, it is most imprudent.

In sum the love of domineering is a motivation which manifests in a number of different arenas and partly explains the persistence of slavery. The love of domineering also explains why slavery is immoral, insofar as it is in direct conflict with all basic natural rights<sup>13</sup>

## Custom and lack of sympathy

I will treat the other causes more briefly. Smith criticized West Indian slavery in TMS V in order to illustrate the power of custom (2):

There is not a negro from the coast of Africa who does not, in this respect, possess a degree of magnanimity which the soul of his sordid master is too often scarce capable of conceiving. Fortune never exerted more cruelly her empire over mankind, than when she subjected those nations of heroes to the refuse of the jails of Europe, to wretches who possess the virtues neither of the countries which they come from, nor of those which they go to, and whose levity, brutality, and baseness, so justly expose them to the contempt of the vanquished. (Smith (1976b) V.2.9)

Africans exhibit magnanimity and the “aweful virtues” in submitting to torture with little or no display of emotion. In contrast, Cicero wept before the Senate (Smith (1976b) V.2.10) exhibiting the amiable virtues of polite society. The respective preferences for aweful and amiable virtues and vices is due not to natural differences between Romans and Africans but to custom.

Smith concludes the discussion of custom in the TMS with a discussion of infanticide. Among “savages” infanticide is “excusable” (Smith (1976b) V 2.16) insofar as in circumstances of extreme need, for example when running from an enemy, the choice is between a parent dying with their infant or dying alone. But in “the latter ages of Greece, however, infanticide was permitted from views of remote interest or conveniency, which could by no means excuse it” (ibid.).

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<sup>13</sup>Notably Smith, unlike Hume, does not rest in his claim that slavery is imprudent on planters’ awareness of its imprudence, but instead remarks that “the work done by freemen comes cheaper **in the end** [AG- emphasis] than that performed by slaves” (Smith (1976a) I.vii.41). As with the persistence of mercantilism, slavery is imprudent for society at large but those who immediately profit from slavery might would individually profit less if it was abolished.

“Uninterrupted custom... authorized the practice” and “when custom can give sanction to so dreadful a violation of humanity, we may imagine that there is scarce any particular practice so gross which it cannot authorise” (ibid.).

Smith doesn't mention slavery here. But insofar as the passage concerning the cruelty of slavery above is a few paragraphs prior, one might draw the inference that custom also bears on its persistence despite immorality. This is also apparent in his discussion of the Stoic system in the concluding chapter of TMS where Smith returns to barbarian and polite society, custom, and to slavery. Smith notes that as a consequence of Greece being roiled “in the most sanguinary wars, in which each sought, not merely superiority or dominion, but either completely to extirpate all its enemies,” the victors would sell “man, woman, and child, like so many herds of cattle, to the highest bidder in the market” (Smith (1976b) VII.ii.1.28).<sup>14</sup> Greeks sold into this “vilest of all states.. domestic slavery” (Smith (1976b) VII.ii.1.28) might be expected to take their own lives. But they mostly did not.

Yet suicide was common among elite Romans both in the late Republic and particularly the Empire. What explains this since “nature, in her sound and healthful state, seems never to prompt us to suicide”? Smith's answer is - in addition to the more regular cause of melancholia – a fashion for suicide “among the proud Romans” of the Empire (Smith (1976b) VII.ii.1.33)<sup>15</sup> driven by aristocratic “vanity and ostentation” (Smith (1976b) VII.ii.1.28). Furthermore, it is in this form a distinctly a product of polite societies. In this sense it provides an analogue to the customary persistence of slavery.

Custom has a close connection to lack of sympathy via customary ranks of men.<sup>16</sup> Smith notes in LJ that “those persons most excite our compassion and are most apt to affect our sympathy who most resemble ourselves, and the greater the difference the less we are affected by them. {The same will be the case with slaves.}” (Smith (1978) A iii.109). He goes on to suggest that opulence generates lack of sympathy (3). In slave societies all that enslaved persons produce is taken by the slaver. This leads to a greater and greater wealth gap between enslaved persons and slavers. The same mechanisms which explain our admiration for the rich and powerful and our inability to sympathize with the poor (Smith (1976b) I.iii), and which give rise to the system of ranks also explain the lack of sympathy with slaves. This is amplified by the quantity of enslaved persons in large scale slave societies which keeps the slavers “in continuall dread of them, and the greatest rigour and severity is consequently exercised upon” (Smith (1978) A iii.108). Fear leading to a reinforcement of distance from slaves, in conjunction with a tendency to not sympathize with the poor and powerless results in a nearly complete inability to sympathize<sup>17</sup> and reinforces love of domination.

<sup>14</sup>Smith seems to have the *Iliad*, *The Trojan Women*, etc. in mind here insofar as he is continuing the contrast between barbarians – like the early Greeks – and later Rome.

<sup>15</sup>For a helpful discussion see Lustila (2020).

<sup>16</sup>Garrett and Hanley (2015), 272-3 stresses the role of custom, but to the exclusion of the other causes to be discussed.

<sup>17</sup>Charles Griswold claims that the contrast between the magnanimous enslaved person and



## Slave wealth and political influence

The causes discussed so far provide a motivation to enslave persons, some reason for the persistence of the institution of slavery, and an explanation of why slavers might not morally respond to the suffering of slaves. But it does not give any explanations of why the motivation of the love of domineering might generally offset the prudential considerations given their great motivating power, as opposed to in particular cases of despotic individuals. If “the work done by freemen comes cheaper in the end than that performed by slaves” why would slavers in general be willing to offset prudence to domineer?

The answer is that they wouldn’t in general, although particular individuals might. Slavery persists in general in circumstances where domineering and prudence mutually reinforce one another.<sup>18</sup> But although enslaving persons is less prudent in general than free labor under normal conditions, it may be sufficiently prudent under special conditions to persist in conjunction with the other causes. Furthermore it may be more prudent to continue with slave labor than to switch to free labor, in particular if the slaveowner’s wealth – like the mercantilist’s wealth -- can leverage the system in their favor. This is because:

the great stock of a West India planter consists in the slaves he has in his plantation. To abolish slavery therefore would be to deprive the far greater part of the subjects, and the nobles in particular, of the chief and most valuable part of their substance. This they would never submit to, and a general insurrection would ensue. For no single man ever had or possibly could have power sufficient to enable him to strip his subjects in that manner. If he set a slave at liberty this was robbing his master of the whole value of him. This therefore could never take place. This institution therefore of slavery, which has taken place in the beginning of every society, has hardly any possibility of being abolished. (Smith (1978) A iii.116)

This passage, one of the most pessimistic in Smith’s corpus, gets at a fundamental reason for the persistence of modern slavery. Slavers both profit from the labor of enslaved persons and from their sale. “In all countries where slavery takes place[s] the greatest part of the riches of the subjects consists in slaves” the slaver wants to hold onto and expand their stock in enslaved persons for prudential reasons. And they want subjects to domineer. Enslaved persons are the means to profit, capital, and subjects to domineer. That abolition would result in “general insurrection” is a mark of how much the slaveowners depend on the

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the sordid master at TMS V.2.9 – which would have recalled Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* for Smith’s readership – is an attempt to enliven our sympathy for the enslaved person and draw them further (or at all) into the impartial spectator’s sphere of consideration (Griswold Jr. (1998), 92). If this is accurate it further reinforces that for Smith lack of sympathy is one of the anchors of the persistence of the slave system. Smith does not present the racializing of the slave system as a further means cultivated by slavers to block sympathy, but his analysis is not inconsistent with this explanation.

<sup>18</sup>I am only considering societies where free labor is an option.

ersons they enslave for their wealth.<sup>19</sup> This is reinforced by Smith’s famous comment that “The late resolution of the Quakers in Pennsylvania to set at liberty their negro slaves, may satisfy us that their number cannot be very great. Had they made any considerable part of their property, such a resolution could never have been agreed to” (Smith (1976a) III.ii.10).<sup>20</sup>

In slave societies built on the cultivation of a single crop there is little possibility of abolition. Sugar and other monocrops provide the avenue to wealth. The secondary avenues all support slavery insofar as they benefit from the redistribution of profits from the enslaved. Consequently the slavers and the trading companies with whom they trade exclusively maintain monopolies and artificial conditions of extraction. Slavers then flood markets with sugar thus destroying potential free labor competition and artificially propping up profits in “excess” of those dictated by the natural price.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore under such brutal and terrible conditions in places where laborers die in under ten years and with little extant labor pool, attracting free labor may be difficult.<sup>22</sup> There is little attractive to free labor to work cultivating sugar under the horrific conditions of the plantation. And even when there are pools of impoverished laborers the perception of performing the labor of a group who all sympathy has been blocked is an impediment (Galloway 1971). As Hume notes “wherever hired servants can be procured” free labor is preferred, but this assumes that it can be procured. This was likely reinforced by penal servitude in the sugar colonies functioning as a threat in British law courts.

Due to the fact that it is locally prudent for slavers to persist in enslavement for the same reasons it is prudent for mercantilists, we should think of Smith’s general rule that free labor is preferable in the end to enslaved labor as an argument for legislators thinking about the long-term future not slavers thinking about present profits. And since Smith thinks that slavery cannot be entirely eradicated due to the causes discussed above it a qualified argument. “The science of the legislator” can be of great value to the long-term wealth of a nation if it can curtail slavery to some extent. But it cannot eradicate slavery.

Finally since “the profits of a sugar-plantation in any of our West Indies colonies are generally much greater than those of any other cultivation that is known either in Europe or America” (Smith (1975), 3.2.10) sugar cultivation can absorb the relative inefficiency due to the massive profits. Smith indeed goes on to note that sugar “can afford the expence of slave-cultivation” better “than tobacco” and that “the number of negroes accordingly is much greater, in proportion to that of whites, in our sugar than in our tobacco colonies” (Smith (1975), 3.2.10).

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<sup>19</sup>In fact the record is complicated. In Brazil the move to abolition was eventually relatively peaceful. See Galloway 1971.

<sup>20</sup>See Pack (1996) 266-8 for the background of this passage.

<sup>21</sup>Thanks to an anonymous referee for stressing this point and for suggesting the relevance of Smith’s account of natural price in this context.

<sup>22</sup>Thanks to Mauricio Coutinho and Barry Weingast for emphasizing the importance of this point.

In an ideal situation greater profits might ensue if free-labor was or could be employed. But the conjunction of effective monopoly, harsh conditions with little free labor, and the extraordinary profit of sugar overshadow any short-term or long-term lack of profitability. And love of domineering, custom, and lack of sympathy all reinforce the practices, however immoral

In addition Smith does stress that in republics – societies where individual slaveholders have the say in governance – slaveholders like mercantilists will leverage their wealth to maintain their monopolies and profits despite its imprudence for the society in general. In addition to the profits from exclusive control of sugar slavery also promises further wealth for slavers from those born into slavery. This results in the entrenchment of the slave trade due to the interests of slave owners.

Consequently far from being unaware of the importance of slavery to wealth in modern democratic societies, Smith is (as far as I know) the first author to really stress this and point to a basic reason why. Democratic societies, and particularly societies with a senatorial class, will tend to leverage political structures to maintain their wealth. When the wealth is entrenched, however immoral the institution, republics will not be likely to abolish it. As there are more republics in the modern world there is paradoxically more and worse slavery.

John C. Calhoun, the American Senator whose plantation eventually became the grounds of Clemson University, was a plantocratic admirer of Roman Republicanism and owned at least 50 enslaved persons. George Fitzhugh argued for the plantocracy based on contrasting the organic Aristotelian wholes of the south with the extraction of Northern labor practices. Cicero similarly was not likely to argue for freedom for the Roman slaves due not just to his elitism but also his vested interest in the inequity. In all of these societies the wealthy classes also have an outsized say. This is a further motivation for slaveowners to expand slavery, insofar as it makes the slave class more politically powerful (Pack (1996), 261). It also, again, parallels explanations for the persistence of mercantilism.

## Contrary to law

I have argued that slavery begins in the love of domination, is forwarded by custom and reinforced by the lack of sympathy. Slavery becomes wholly entrenched in slave-holding republics – like Rome and the Caribbean plantocracies -- with a high relative population of enslaved persons due to slaveholders and politically leveraging their monopolies and maintaining their slave stock and artificial profits despite it being imprudent in the end. The persistence of slavery is thus due to the way in which love of domination – the initial motivation -- is reinforced by artificial monopoly and custom and lack of sympathy to the moral plight of the enslaved. The local profitability of slaver monopolies explain its prudential persistence despite being generally imprudent in the end. The lack of

sympathy in conjunction with the love of domineering explains the persistence of its immorality.

But why in Rome and the Caribbean did slavery becomes more violent and morally repellent as other relations of authority such as husband over wife or parent over child become less? Part of the explanation has to with the size of the plantations and the the resultant lack of sympathy for the enslaved. Smith ends both sets of *Lectures on Jurisprudence* with a discussion of the acquisition of enslaved persons. War is the primary source of enslaved persons. Children born of war captives become enslaved persons, enslavement is used as a punishment and a judicial threat, as a means to absolve debt, and lastly people selling themselves into slavery. Smith notes – with Montesquieu and Rousseau and against Grotius – that selling yourself into slavery is contractually impossible and suggests self-sale is in reality a species of debt slavery. Smith then adds in LJ A (ending in mid-sentence):

shall only observe farther with regard to slavery, in confirmation of what I asserted, that it was the weakness of government that gave rise to it; that this was entirely the ease with regard to the West Indian and at {Smith (1978), A iii.147}

and in LJ B:

The slavery in the West Indies took place contrary to law. Isabella and Ferdinand were at the were at the greatest pains to prevent the Indians from falling into a state of servitude, their intention being to make settlements, to trade with them and to instruct them. But Columbus and Cortez were far from the law, and obeyed not their orders but reduced them to slavery, which in a manner instituted itself among them. (Smith 1978, B 145)

Smith is suggesting that the institution of New World slavery took hold in the manner in which it did because it was unregulated and beyond law. By rejecting the authority of Ferdinand and Isabella, Columbus and Cortes could do whatever they wanted. And so they extracted wealth for themselves with no restrictions. The manner in which they did this and satisfied their love of domineering became institutionalized and then customary and so a lawless practice became entrenched within a larger regulated world not the least due to the political power which safeguarded it and those who profited from its existence.

John Salter (Salter 1996, 142) takes lack of regulation to be the ultimate origin of slavery whether in war, colonizing expeditions, or in weak states (Salter 1996, 142). Lack of regulation is also a primary reason for its persistence. If no one offsets the interests of slaveholders, if regulation is ineffective or weak, then the institution persists. It is also instructive that Smith's reference to lawlessness is made in both sets of lectures directly following Smith's dismissal of selling oneself into slavery. That a person could fall into debt slavery – and that it might be represented as the consequence of a valid contract with a slaver – is a mark of weak governance. These conditions held in the West Indies and due

to the lack of laws or counterpower abet the cruelty of the practices involved while at the same time the exercise of violent authority towards family members might diminish.<sup>23</sup>

Smith's passage strikingly echoes a pivotal claim in David Graeber's *Debt* (Graeber (2011), 317-18). Graeber suggests that the conquest of the New World with its attendant horrors was driven by debt – Cortés was in debt and his men were in even greater debt at the end of the conquest than when they began and so had incentive to continuing the devastation. Smith is suggesting though that modern slavery arises in absence of law and its violence, artifice, and monopoly thrive in absence of regulation. When entrenched it can only be countered by the fiat of a monarch or of an absolute religious authority who does not have to fear from the political and economic power of slavers.

## Gew gaws and trinkets

Smith's account of slavery is systematic and insightful and provides a prominent example of Smith's pessimism about the ability of unregulated markets to counter immorality much the less fair market conditions (WN IV.ii.43). Slavery is, according to Smith, a persistent and ubiquitous institution. Its ubiquity is due to ubiquitous natural human desires and recurring conditions and it is persistent due to the interaction of these causes with other ubiquitous features of human nature and society. But the depravity of West Indian slavery draws on particular to the modern world, i.e. the lawless conquest of the Americas, and mercantilism in modern economies as well as particularities of the cultivation of monocrops in brutal climates and their fungibility on a world market.

In his discussion of the lawlessness of slavery Smith is reported to claim that “there is no such thing as slavery among us” (Smith 1978, B 145).<sup>24</sup> This claim is perplexing since the colonies were British. And the lecture was given before Lord Mansfield's decision on the Somerset case. Nor was it true as a restricted claim about Scotland. Scotland had no major slave ports unlike England where ports such as Leeds and Bristol<sup>25</sup> shipped hundred of thousands of enslaved persons to North America, the Caribbean, or to death in the Middle Passage. But Scots profited from the trade in human beings (Morris (2018), 113) as workers who ordered and made the trade efficient: managers, lawyers, doctors, accountants, and overseers. Some used this to then to purchase human beings and become plantation owners in Jamaica and elsewhere in the Caribbean and returned the wealth to Scotland (Graham 2015, 96). The historian Tom Devine concludes that “the story is a complex one, but even when all the qualifications are taken on board, the central argument remains that the Atlantic slave-based economies

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<sup>24</sup>Thanks to Ryan Hanley for stressing the importance of this passage.

<sup>25</sup>Smith's friend David Hume spent the period directly before he began work on *A Treatise of Human Nature* in the employ of a Bristol merchant.

can be considered key factors in Scotland’s eighteenth-century transformation” (Devine (2015a)).

To give a characteristic example, Alexander Campbell was born on the Isle of Islay in 1739.<sup>26</sup> Campbell was encouraged in the Jamaican tobacco trade by his older siblings and in 1763 bought “two plantations and three hundred slaves in Grenada” (Alston (2021), 56). By 1790 Campbell was wealthy, owned over a thousand enslaved persons and had become a leading anti-abolitionist and advocate for the Grenadian plantocracy. His anti-abolitionist agitation brought him to London on numerous occasions including to challenge the right of the Crown to impose duties on sugar. Campbell was also a high-ranking member of the Grenadian militia. He was killed in an uprising of enslaved persons and free blacks known as the Fédon Revolution in 1795.

Campbell’s trajectory is notable but characteristic: from the tobacco trade through the 1750s to slave-ownership and the plantocracy in the 1760s and the accrual of great quantities of enslaved persons in the 1790s. As a Scots younger son of a larger family he could expect no inheritance and sought his fortune via the “clannish” networks of Scots merchants and workers in the New World. Campbell’s prominence as an anti-abolitionist was somewhat rarer – although not his anti-abolitionism as such – as perhaps was his Highland origin.<sup>27</sup>

Even less characteristic was that one of Campbell’s enslaved persons escaped and became free on a trip to London. Ottobah Cugoano was kidnapped from the Gold Coast – present-day Ghana – when he was 10 years old and shipped to Grenada where he was eventually purchased by Campbell. Cugoano was an important abolitionist and the author of the most incisive British criticism of the slave trade in the eighteenth century: *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (1787).

Carrie Shanafelt has contrasted Smith and Cugoano and argued that Smith’s “mostly optimistic view of the evolution of global mercantilism” (Shanafelt 2021, 22) is in conflict with his “queasy acceptance” (Shanafelt (2021), 37) of the slave trade as arising from an ineradicable “quirk” of human nature went hand in hand with his optimistic promotion of free commerce which masked his difficult relation to public debt (Shanafelt (2021), 28). As a consequence Smith was unable to see, unlike Cugoano, that the hoarding of public debt by an enriched slaveholding class maintained and fed the slave system and was a tool to wield “power over public policy and international relations” (Shanafelt (2021), 37).

I hope I have shown in contrast that Smith stressed the connection between the persistence of slavery and the wealth and power of a slave owner class and its capacity to leverage economies through financial and political power. Smith is deeply pessimistic about universal abolition (Pack 1996) but less due to a queasy acceptance of the love of domineering than due to his awareness of how lawlessness and monopoly persist despite legislation in democratic societies. I

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<sup>26</sup>All information on Campbell is from Alston (2021).

<sup>27</sup>Although as David Alston shows not uncommon (Alston (2021)).

am in agreement with Shanafelt though that Cugoano's analysis presents a compelling account of the wrongs of slavery and adds something important worryingly missing from Smith. This is connected with Smith's claim about the exceptionality of Scotland.

Smith tends to separate the immorality of slavery from its imprudence in the sense that he treats them as different explanations of what is wrong with slavery in toto. That it is immoral does not make it imprudent and vice-versa. This is important for Smith's explanation as I presented it insofar as the local prudence of the slaveowner motivates the expansion of slavery despite its immorality. He works hard to separate the two throughout his work, in part because he is aware that the many attempts of moral philosophers to argue for the simple convergence of the good and the prudent are dubious. Smith is clear that although the desire for trinkets and gewgaws may be vicious its consequences are not consistently vicious and may indeed be prudent (Smith 1976a, II.3.32). He famously argues that the great proprietors "sold their birth-right, not like Esau for a mess of pottage in time of hunger and necessity, but in the wantonness of plenty, for trinkets and baubles" (Smith (1976a) III.iv.15). The point is that the local lure of trinkets results in a momentous historical transformation – leases – which in turn gives rise to prudential benefits and greater liberty.

But why doesn't the love of domineering stop the great European proprietors from giving up their imprudent domination of their subjects and offering them leases on the land they had previously been tied to? Wouldn't they be willing to absorb imprudence to hold on to their positions? I take it Smith has three answers. First the transformation was gradual, unlike abolition, and so could take hold imperceptibly and without resistance from a less-united class. Second the great proprietors made far less profit than the West Indian planters due to the depopulation of their lands and the lack of foreign commerce and so could not absorb the imprudence. Slaveholders depopulate the lands they kidnap enslaved persons from. But enslaved persons expand the population of the West Indies. And third the sugar trade and the slave trade were a main axis of foreign commerce unlike the mostly local commerce of the proprietors.

Cugoano's view (Cugoano 1787, 39–40) offers a telling contrast with Smith's insofar as he focuses on how immorality and prudence interact. The contrast is best made by distinguishing how they respectively understand the lawlessness of West Indian slavery. For Smith, slavery arises from and flourishes in lawless conditions – i.e. conditions where there are no regulations restricting the love of domineering – and the lawlessness give rise to, enables, and makes profitable an immoral, and in the end imprudent, customary institution.

Cugoano concurs with Smith that slavery is a fundamental moral violation.<sup>28</sup> He also notes that New World slavery arose in the explorers' rejection of Ferdinand's laws (Cugoano 1787, 107). But for Cugoano West Indian slavery is contrary

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<sup>28</sup>I am not suggesting that Cugoano was familiar with the *Wealth of Nations*. He does not mention it and there are very few extant records of his intellectual life to be had.

to law in a different sense. It is not just contrary to extant legal authority but originates in actions – theft of persons, their ability to act freely, and all their property and progeny – which violate moral, natural, and religious laws.<sup>29</sup> It is not comparable with employment or other modes of labor, as Smith understands it in connection with its imprudence. It is kidnapping and theft.<sup>30</sup>

The importance of slavery for wealth production in the economy is not much discussed by Smith unlike the cases of free labor and the serfs who eventually became renters. Since slavery for Smith is imprudent in general and in the end, ubiquitous, and ineradicable, although he acknowledges its role in the global economy via sugar he does not extensively discuss the ways in which the wealth in enslaved persons and from the thievery of their labor is the backbone of the putatively fair economy.<sup>31</sup> That it is theft not a mode of labor seems obvious once it is stated, and was obvious to Cugoano, but not to Smith.

As a consequence, for Cugoano the markets which profit from the slave trade, whether sugar or other more peripheral markets which support and profit from enslaving persons, are unlawful and immoral. The persons who take part in and profit from these markets are immoral. And the lawless international competition of nations for advantage in and through the slave trade expands its criminality. Persons, liberty, and labor are criminally appropriated and then laundered. Cugoano concludes that all Britons who do not campaign for abolition have responsibility for the slave trade just by virtue of knowing of slavery and not stopping it (Cugoano 1787, 103). He is very aware of the fact that there is “slavery among us” insofar as it drives the world economy which links us together.

He is also far more aware of slavery being among us in a more local sense since, unlike Smith, Cugoano knowledge is derived that West Indian slavery is distinctive in terms of its cruelty and lawlessness is from first-person experience: “Some of the Africans in my country kept slaves, which they take in war, or for debt; but those which they keep are well fed, and good care taken of them and treated well.” Cugoano then continues “but I may safely say, that all the poverty and misery that any of the inhabitants of Africa meet with among themselves, is far inferior to those inhospitable regions of misery which they meet with in the West-Indies, where there hard-hearted overseers have neither regard to the laws of God, nor the life of their fellow men” (Cugoano 1787, 13). That there might be less cruel forms of slavery is not inconsistent with Smith<sup>32</sup> who also

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<sup>29</sup>On Cugoano’s novel take on natural law see Hasan-Birdwell, forthcoming.

<sup>30</sup>Thanks to Joseph Annan for stressing the differences between kidnapping and theft in Cugoano’s explanation.

<sup>31</sup>Shanafelt (2021) articulates the way in which this connects with the joint-stock companies dominating through debt extremely clearly.

<sup>32</sup>Smith contrasts West Indian slavery with slavery in North America and remarks that the slave owner in North America “looks on his slave as his friend and partner, and treats him with the greatest kindness” (Smith 1776, A iii.110). Smith adds that in North America the slavery system is “humane” due to “poverty” [ibid.] and presumably due to the comparatively small slave population of the colonies in the first three quarters of the eighteenth century. It is true that when WN was published there were nearly ten enslaved persons to every non-enslaved person in Jamaica (Sheridan (1976), 294), whereas in South Carolina, the state with the



stresses the causes of the distinctive cruelty of West Indian slavery. But it raises a different set of issues for Cugoano.

Many societies have forms of limited servitude which differ from the institution described by Smith insofar as they are not the product of domineering and lack of regulation but instead customary regulated, prudential institutions. In other words, for Cugoano “slavery” is not defined by labor or domineering but is a large class of social institutions which involve restricting individual liberty. In the period in which Cugoano was kidnapped, due to the intercession of and competition between the Dutch and the British Royal African Company, pawnship (the practice Cugoano describes) was “common throughout Atlantic Africa . . . a carefully regulated institution through which a trader handed over family members or other dependents to be held as a sort of collateral in the advance of credit” (Shumway 2011, 59). Pawnship gave way to “panyarring”, hostage-taking initiated by creditors (Shumway 2011, 60).

The area of present-day Ghana from which Cugoano was kidnapped underwent enormous political transformations in the eighteenth century in connection with the shift from trading in gold to trading in enslaved persons. Prominent causes included conflicts between the Fante people, to whom Cugoano belonged, and other groups such as the Asante, and conflicts between the English and Dutch to control the trade which included stoking inter-African conflicts, and transformations in the practices of enslavement. The changes were driven by the profitability of trade in gold having created networks of trading markets – Cape Coast Castle where Cugoano was taken to be sent to Grenada was originally a hub of the gold trading network – and then the expanding profitability of the initially peripheral trade in human beings.

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highest percentage of enslaved persons, the population of enslaved persons was roughly 40% of the total population. And it is also true that in the New England colonies the population of enslaved persons was far lower and as a consequence tended more often to live with their enslavers than in distinct quarters. But characterizing slavery as humane, in particular the North American system, is wrong and offensive. On a charitable reading, Smith means that *the treatment* tended to be more humane, but that the institution itself is thoroughly immoral. This is in keeping with Smith’s understanding of the love of domineering as not necessarily being cruel. Although it takes the form of cruelty when combined with other causes – fear, distance from the person dominated – the love of domineering can also take different forms (as with mercantilists or Montesquieu’s Roxana). What is central to it is that the enslaved person is unable to resist on pains of death or cruelty. But a slaver might show kindness to an enslaved person – for example Phylis Wheatley’s master’s daughter who taught her to read – while the institution itself is wholly immoral (and also the threats of death and cruelty for a resistant enslaved person which hold the institution in place). On a less charitable reading – which is compatible with the more charitable reading – Smith came to this conclusion both from evidence from dubious sources such as Benjamin Rush (Pack (1996), 268) and from systematic concerns. The conclusion that North American slavery is humane is driven by Smith’s belief that the cruelty of slavery in the large-scale plantation societies of Rome and the West Indies is heightened by the ratio of enslaved persons to slavers which blocks sympathy. Conversely societies without these impediments – early Rome and the North American Colonies – will tend to be less brutal or even humane due to the familiarity of slavers with enslaved. Smith’s humane farmer side by side with his cherished slaves has no basis in fact (as far as I know). In other words, the problem is that Smith wants to offer a law-like general mechanism for the affective attitudes as an explanation in the rise of and reinforcement of slavery.

Unsurprisingly, the creditors took Cugoano and countless others hostage on slim or no pretext. Due to the intercession of the joint stock companies “the distinctions between pawnship, panyarring, and outright kidnapping became blurred” (Shumway (2011), 60). Unlike pawnship, which is a voluntary arrangement, or like hostage taking which may be involuntary but regulated, panyarring is kidnapping, robbery, and piracy (Cugoano 1787, 39–40). It is not comparable to free labor.

As previously noted, West Indian slavery developed according to Cugoano from a particular sort of lawlessness: organized theft parasitic on regulated practices which were taken advantage of and used to justify kidnapping. Slave practices in West Africa and all over the world were different in kind from the sorts of large-scale predatory slavery practiced by Europeans<sup>33</sup> which were not social regulation to avoid war and conflict but theft.

In order to use pawnship to justify panyarring, intermediaries were needed to bring persons like Cugoano from the interior to the coast.<sup>34</sup> If slavery is kidnapping and lawless theft of the worst sort, how could fellow inhabitants of the “Gold Coast” be brought to aid the Royal Africa Company? They did not do so under threat, but of their own volition:

These kid-nappers and slave procurers, called merchants, are a species of African villains, which are greatly corrupted, and even viciated by their intercourse with the Europeans; but, wicked and barbarous as they certainly are, I can hardly think, if they knew what horrible barbarians they were sending their fellow-creatures to, they would do it. But the artful Europeans have so deceived them, that they are bought by their inventions of merchandize, and beguiled into it by their artifice; for the Europeans, at their factories, in some various manner, have always kept some as servants to them, and with gaudy cloaths, in a gay manner, as decoy ducks, to deceive others, and to tell them that they want many more to go over the sea and be as they are. So in that respect, wherein it may be said that they will sell one another, they are only ensnared and enlisted to be servants, kept like some of those which they see at the factories, which, for some gew-gaws, as presents given to themselves and friends, they are thereby enticed to go; and something after the same manner that East-India soldiers are procured in Britain; and the inhabitants here, just as much sell themselves, and one another, as they do; and the kid-nappers here, and the slave-procurers in Africa, are much alike. (Cugoano 1787, 26–27)

In this passage Cugoano undermines a standard justification of slavery on which Europeans are merchants who buy enslaved persons from Africans who had

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<sup>33</sup>This is not to suggest that there are not other examples of large-scale predatory pirate slaver – the Roman Empire for example. Rather it is to suggest that slavery can take fundamentally different forms.

<sup>34</sup>Cugoano (1787), 6-11.

enslaved them and draws in his white readership with the comparison between procuring enslaved persons and soldiers and the infamous practice of luring or kidnapping free British men into colonial service to expand empire (Way (2013)). More importantly Cugoano is explaining how African middlemen engaged in the slave trade at all. They were lured into the practice by “gew-gaws” and “gaudy cloaths” to function as decoy ducks and draw others into slavery while themselves being – although wicked and corrupted – mostly deceived.

What Cugoano is describes is the wealthy – in this case the Royal Africa Company – using the desire of the relatively poor<sup>35</sup> to join the higher class as a means to accomplish grossly immoral ends. As a consequence, agents who are ordinary morally mixed human beings can be drawn to do evil things which they would not do if they were aware of the evil results of their participation. Cugoano is in part offering a criticism of the effects of luxury. But he is also, I think, explaining how agents can be deceived into terrible actions – in this case into facilitating the theft of their brethren. They are deceived by the immediate allure of trinkets and the life the trinkets point towards and represent. And they are complicit, although by presenting them as deluded Cugoano suggest they are less complicit than the general British public.

This passage offers an uncanny parallel to Smith’s famous description of the poor man’s son, who motivated by trinkets and gew gaws associated with the upper classes makes a fortune, but finds himself exhausted and deeply unsatisfied. There is a large secondary literature on how exactly to understand the motivation in Smith’s discussion and its relation to Smith’s other views.<sup>36</sup> What is clear is that for Smith the lure of “frivolous objects” associated with “the condition of the rich” (Smith (1976b) IV.i.8) can result in a bad life at the exclusion of other sorts of goods while serving the general interest. This is not intrinsic to the frivolous objects themselves, but is a consequence of their association with “the condition of the rich” (Smith (1976b) IV.i.8).

But why is Cugoano’s poor man’s son lured by gew gaws and trinkets into moral complicity whereas Smith’s poor man’s son is lured into individual unhappiness which may benefit the whole? That Smith could tell the sons of the Glasgow merchants who attended his lectures on jurisprudence that “there is no such thing as slavery among us” suggests a gap between “us” and the enslaved, despite Smith’s deep awareness of the moral depravity of slavery. I think, though, the primary reason is systematic. Lisa Hill has argued that Smith is “extremely

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<sup>35</sup>Cugoano suggests that the economic extremes are not the poor Africans and the rich Europeans but those stolen to the West Indies and those who steal from them. Kingship in West Africa is, according to Cugoano “something like that feudal institution prevailed some time in Scotland” (Cugoano (1787), 28). And the gap between an African king and common people is nothing compared to the state of slavery in the West Indies created by Britain (Cugoano 1787, 13). This sharply contrast with Smith’s infamous claim that the wealth gap between an European prince and a peasant is less than that between a peasant and “many an African king, the absolute master of the lives and liberties of ten thousand naked savages” (Smith 1976a, I.i.11).

<sup>36</sup>See Hill (2017), Sagar (2022), Schliesser (2017), Hanley (2009), among recent treatments.

conflicted about the results of his own social science” and what he takes to be just and virtuous action (Hill (2017)). When discussing slavery Smith mostly maintains a firm distinction between prudential interest and morality and treats slavery as either an imprudent form of employment and stock, or as a rights violation.

Smith took pains to treat political economy in its own terms, virtue and well-being in their own terms, and not to presume that immoral actions were necessarily economically imprudent and vice-versa. There are many points where the two collide, including his discussion of the poor man’s son and his analysis of slavery. But Smith tends to view them as just that, moments of collision. Consequently he does not consider how slavery was systematically reinforced and even demanded by far away consumers in the economy portrayed in *Wealth of Nations*, nor the guilt of the accomplices to the slave trade who profited directly from its maintenance, nor who profited from the blood money derived from it. Slavery is an immoral institution due to the love of domineering, lawlessness, lack of sympathy and custom, *and* it is also an inefficient form of production due to monopoly and the leveraging of wealth. It is a further step to think of an economy itself as immoral, as Cugoano does, making everyone complicit in the immoral actions. To take this step one must think of the act of wealth production as itself immoral theft.

I will conclude by envisioning a different version of the poor man’s son which might have been told by Smith. Imagine a youngest son born into a large family. Due to primogeniture – a central object of Smith’s criticism – they have to make their way in the world. They are drawn by the allure of wealthy Scots estates, men and women of leisure, wondrous machines and the like. Perhaps they become a merchant in the West Indies. They parlay their funds into a more expeditious form – enslaved persons – and they purchase more persons until they are extremely wealthy. Imagine they are examining their life shortly before their death. What do they think of their life? The mechanisms Smith describes will likely insulate them from concern as will the customs and stories they fall back on. Or imagine they are not an Alexander Campbell but one of the countless other cogs in the trade enslaved persons. Perhaps a doctor on a slave ship. Perhaps an accountant for Bristol merchants. Or perhaps just a shopkeeper in Leeds. If their lives go well, is it due to theft from Cugoano and his brethren?<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Thanks to the audience at the University of Calgary, the participants, hosts, and staff of the Tokyo workshop and Waseda University, the participants in the workshop on Slavery and Early Modern Philosophy Workshop at Boston University, an extremely helpful anonymous referee, and David Schmitz for their help with this paper.

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