



## Review of Jordan J. Ballor's and Cornelis van der Kooi's *Theology, Morality and Adam Smith*, Routledge 2022, 314 pp.

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It was James Alvery (2007) who first coined the phrase, the “new view” of Adam Smith. Alvery sought to highlight the influence of religious perspectives on the development of the Adam Smith corpus. This new view might have at first seemed a speculative or experimental academic endeavour were it not, in fact, the ‘older view’ of Cliffe Leslie and Jacob Viner. The older view seemed to have become somewhat passé after important, more recent contributions, for example, by Rothschild. But this debate now appears to be shifting again, and the edited volume of Ballor and Van der Kooi is an important part of this realignment in reading Smith.

This new view has an antipodean following.<sup>1</sup> This led the accomplished Smith scholar Samuel Fleischacker to ask this author across the dining table at Balliol College at the sesquicentennial academic celebration of the publication of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS) at Oxford to inquire why “there was such an interest in Smith’s religious views from down South.” To respond with a typical antipodean passion for cricket as a suitable choice for aphorisms, it is arguably true that in more recent Smith scholarship we antipodeans ‘opened the batting’ on the renewed interest in Smith’s religious perspectives. However, now in this work edited by Ballor and Van der Kooi we see the ‘middle order’ (the core of the cricket batting team), have ‘opened up’ (sic. scoring freely) and produced a splendid ‘innings’ of scholarly work on Smith’s religious views, a major academic contribution of Smith scholarship.

This major work on Smith has made it possible for this ‘new view’ to enter the realm of mainstream debate on Smith and the influences on his thought. Recent significant publications (Rasmussen 2017; Heydt 2017) have continued along the line of argument that interprets Smith as holding similar views of religion to Hume. But this volume offers a substantive body of analysis from serious academic contributors presenting arguments asserting the importance of a range of religious influences on the development of the Smithian corpus, which implies that the ‘new view’ of Smith has grown organically. Ballor and Van der Kooi’s work presents a serious challenge to the position taken by influential authors

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<sup>1</sup> Alvery is from New Zealand and Lisa Hill, Paul Oslington and Brendan Long, contributors to the ‘new view,’ are Australians.

that Smith's religious views are to be elided in considering Smith's enduring philosophical contribution to economics and moral philosophy.

This new work—of interest not just to Smith scholars but also to philosophers of economics, political economy theorists, theologians who write on economics and theologically minded economists—will help to reignite the debate on Smith and religion. This debate has now become genuinely interesting from all sides of the dispute. If Smith's religious views are ultimately judged to be critical in the development of economic discourse, the implications are legion, extending beyond the discipline of economics to speak to the enduring importance of religious ideas in the formation of all we have come to know as our Western values.

To explore these strong claims let us look into how this argument on the religious influences on Smith is developed in the volume. Ballor and van de Kooi describe their work as “a continuation, extension, and deepening of what Paul Oslington has called the “small but growing interdisciplinary field of economics and theology” (2). They identify the secularising tendency in reading Smith (10) and call for “a reassessment of Smith's theological context.” The editors claim two significant contributions to Smith's scholarship in the book: it advances how “the larger context of the Protestant Reformation is brought into dialogue with Smith's work” and “focuses more closely on Smith's own era, its relationships, influences and frameworks as the theological and moral significance and implications of Smith's work” (10). These are two strong claims which we will approach in reverse order.

The volume certainly enhances the debate on key relationships and influences affecting Smith and his Scotland, while helping to build a framework for evaluating the role of theological concerns embedded in his writing. Interestingly, the work tends to avoid the discussion of Smith's relationship with Hume. It is clear that in the evaluation of influences and relationships on Smith there is a new and intense focus on continental influences coming in particular from France, as Smith was writing *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (WN), the famous first ‘inquiry’ of the promised magnum opus on jurisprudence that he never found time to complete. Several strong contributions address these relationships and influences. Patrick Hanley focuses on seventeenth century French authors who are either cited by Smith or who influenced him. Hanley highlights Massillon's odious concern for the “respectful attentions” given to the rich and the great rather than the “wise and the virtuous,” and shows an allusion in Massillon to the futile plight of the poor man's son which Smith explodes into an ironic and yet so persuasive rebuke of the delusion of grandeur in TMS (132, while noting he mentions Hume). Hanley also identifies the influences of La Placette, Pascal, Malebranche, Buffier, and Du Bos, attesting to a rich mine of Francophile ties to Smith's evolving thought.

The volume as a whole can be taken as a selection of proponents of a form of theism in Smith. David Ferguson agrees that Smith has theistic “strains” but also a “naturalistic” inclination, a low-key theism that tended towards the moderate wing of eighteenth century Scotland—but is not as sceptical as Hume. It is an interesting characterisation, but one more guarded on Smith's theology than most of the other writers in the volume. In contrast, Erik

Matson gives greater emphasis to the religious context influencing Smith by highlighting a congruence and overlapping project in Smith's ethics with the work of Joseph Butler. Smith sides with Butler in his concerns in relation to Mandeville's overly negative role for self-love. Matson also highlights the tension in both Smith and Butler in the relationship between self-love as a positive ethic and the need for benevolence to be the higher ethic. He also highlights how Butler seems to prefigure Smith's approach to the Invisible Hand thesis of overall good coming from a pursuit of self-love or self-interest (204). Christina McRorie also insists on highlighting the context of Smith's thought and its foundational sense of the role of the market as being a social construct. McRorie affirms a "darker side" to Smith's ethics when the market mechanisms, and the moral sentiments that underpin them, fail; he notes that this failure is sometimes cited as a theodicy in Smith (see Hill 2001).

Jordon Ballor, in his own article which engages in some scholarly deep sea diving into Smith's sources, finds a great pearl. With strict methodological rigour applied to exclude extraneous material he finds that "there are more than 250 separate titles in Smith's library that have some religious or theological connection," or roughly 15 per cent of Smith's overall collection (46). The conclusion that one in six of Smith's sources have a religious or theological connection is a strong argument for the so-called 'new view' of Smith.

Edd Noell locates well the influence of the scholastic tradition on Smith's thought. He summarizes the scholastic approach to markets, with its emphasis on duty and charity in price setting, noting that Smith moves away from this perspective by focusing more on institutional factors like the presence of monopolistic practices and regulation that favours the merchant over the ordinary worker. While Noell charts the influence of the protestant turn on the role of markets towards considerations of commutative justice over distributive justice, he also sees Smith as offering something of a correction here. Smith sees the impediments to the market as caused not just by greedy merchants, but by bad policy of government. Relying more on a moral philosophy underpinned by a natural theology, he sees Smith as arguing for policy that enhances the benevolent aspects of our commercial undertakings. In the interplay of commutative against distributive justice, Smith tends to favour the latter over the former. Still, there is no reliance on a prescriptive dogmatic theology but an ethics derived from a natural theology of economic action where the moral sentiments are directed to their natural, more benevolent ends against the more malevolent model that flows from poor regulation. For Noell, it is a natural theology of economics that assimilates the scholastic tradition and the protestant reforms, but does so in a way that recovers the importance ultimately of distributive justice.

The second contribution of the volume—that of outlining how the larger context of the Protestant Reformation is brought into dialogue with Smith's work—takes us to a range of authors and a vast terrain, yet one name features most prominently: Augustine. Smith was by no stretch of the imagination a pure Augustinian, as he did not accept Augustine's rejection of self-love. The volume rather seeks to explore how important were the assimilations of Augustinianism in movements in early modern philosophy on the development of Smith's

writing. The question has been raised before by Anthony Waterman (2004), who suggests Smith takes a quasi-Augustinian theodicy in his approach to economics. This volume unpacks the broad Waterman thesis from diverse angles of reflection. In his contribution, “Smith and Enlightened Augustinianism”, Joost Hengstmengel speaks of the “neo-Augustinians” who are seen as diverse as Dutch Calvinists, English Puritans, German Lutherans, and French Jansenists. Several contributors to this volume refer to the influence of Nicole and Malebranche from the French Jansenists, who generally take a strongly negative view of self-love in assessing ethical conduct.

Andrew McGinnis helps lay the groundwork for approaching the notion of self-love in the period preceding Smith, highlighting that whether self-love was to be interpreted positively or negatively was at that time an open question. This movement is implicated with a methodological move away from a purely theological basis for ethics towards an emphasis on natural theology. Noting the positive sense of self-love in David Rogers, Joseph Hall, and Henry Scougal, McGinnis highlights the influential work of Gershom Carmichael, whose influence on Francis Hutcheson must have been transmitted to Smith, stating there is for Carmichael “no necessary conflict between sociability and self-love” (87). He gives the counterview of Daniel Cawdrey and Thomas Watson and Richard Baxter’s view of limiting self-love to a sense of self-denial. We also have the position of Archibald Campbell—where self-love is fundamentally positive and “Implanted in our Nature” by God, these rules of God are derived from moral philosophy rather than strict theology. McGinnis ultimately rebuts the view that a positive sense of self-love was absent from protestant thought in the early modern period. What McGinnis highlights is the ebullient debate in the protestant community on the role of self-love in the hundred or so years before Smith put pen to paper in Scotland.

Luigino Bruno and Paolo Santori also make an interesting contribution. While emphasising the importance of the Augustinian influence on Smith, they take a middle position, noting the influence of the Jansenists yet also acknowledging the positions of Paul Oslington and Brendan Long that tie Smith’s theodicy to natural theology. Bruno and Santori suggest a change in Smith in his exposure to the French Jansenists and thereby call for a re-evaluation of the Adam Smith Problem—the thesis that emphasises the differences in theological positions between TMS and WN. They suggest further research into economics and virtue ethics along the lines of Deirdre McCloskey and Luigino Bruni and Robert Sugden. This a further example of how contributors in this volume seek to prise open questions in Smith scholarship that seemed to have been broadly settled. Govert Buijs’ contribution emphasizes what he calls theology type A and B. Type-A theology is a typical top-down theology, where revelation is propounded from above. Type B is a theology from below, where individual religious agents develop a spirituality which takes hold and develops organically. Smith is seen as a type-B theologian. Buijs talks of an eschatology, a theological expression of a final purpose embedded in Smith’s thought yet partially realised in the causality of this-worldly moral actions. This occurs where the everyday person works in equal dignity through their labour, working with a concern for justice and fighting poverty, leading to a bourgeois

revolution for social reform. Buijs maintains that Smith is a key figure in this bourgeois revolution, providing an influential account of how ordinary people act as agents of social reform. Smith's eschatology is the empowerment of bourgeois society to improve itself from below, part of a grand divine plan yet based on the activation of moral responsibility of all persons—theologically inspired as a 'priesthood' of all believers—a strong traditional protestant theological perspective now adopted by Catholicism in good measure since the Second Vatican Council. Buijs presents a strong theological reading of Smith's work as implicated with a program of theologically inspired social and economic renewal.

Van der Kooi, in his individual article, leads us to examine the influence of Calvin on Smith, a canvas of similarities and differences. Calvin has a sense of the continual need for God's intervention. Providence, for Calvin, has three forms: a general providence underpinning all nature, a special providence for human persons in history and a "very special" (for Van der Kooi) providence for all Christians. Van der Kooi charts the move away from this special providence to a tendency (65) to a focus on general providence in nature. This is clearly Smith's perspective emphasising how conscience is natural, guided by God in his creation, but not a supernatural intervention (as Calvin requires). While the differences between Calvin and Smith are clear, there are also connections on the importance of the Golden Rule—to love another as oneself. Van der Kooi is clear that Smith's position is Christian but involves a more optimistic anthropology than Calvin, with the insistence that the created world in which we live is good and that nature, human nature, is the efficient causality of providence. Van der Kooi thus shows Smith in contrast to Calvin—the latter is the foil; the counterpoint Smith reacts to Calvin in developing a more optimistic theological perspective on human sentiments.

So to crystallise what is at stake in this volume, we can say that it produces two tasks. Firstly, a serious academic achievement has been made to align Smith with a developing more progressive movement with the protestant tradition at the time of the Scottish enlightenment. Secondly, this research shows Smith's thought is implicated with a move from more dogmatic theological influences to a tendency towards natural theology and a more optimistic anthropology. The volumes also identifies influences on Smith that emerged particularly in France with the neo-Augustinians and the Jansenists. Smith seems to react to the negative view of self-love of the Jansenists to find a new middle way, a very influential synthesis of the bivalent and open textured notion of self-love, with positive and negative dimensions albeit with a great scepticism on the influence of the pursuit of wealth and grandeur on genuinely moral action. By locating the influences of these currents of reflection—the sceptical neo-Augustinians and the more progressive enlightenment voices—Smith has come to an influential synthesis on the role of self-love in moral discourse. Ultimately, the identification of these influences, which are generally of a religious nature, strengthens the claims now being increasingly made that religious perspectives remain central to the development of the Smithian corpus: the so-called 'new view.'

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